
REVIEWS

At the Top of the Ferris Wheel: Selected Haiku of Cor van den Heuvel, by Cor van den Heuvel (Winchester, Va.: The Haiku Foundation, 2017). 304 pages; 6" x 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9826951-5-9. Price: \$30.00 from www.thehaikufoundation.org

Reviewed by Paul Miller

Van den Heuvel is well known to haikuists as poet, theorist, and anthologist—most widely known for his three editions of *The Haiku Anthology*. In addition, he has won many awards, including The Masoaka Shiki International Haiku Prize in 2002. *ATTOTFW* collects together selected haiku from sixteen collections, published between 1961 and 2008, bookended by a short autobiographical introduction and closing interview with Robert Wilson. Considering that most of these early collections are near-impossible to find, a selected works is welcome. In addition to showcasing the fine and often-classic haiku of van den Heuvel, it also allows a more thorough and historical reading of his corpus.

Van den Heuvel was born in Maine in 1931, and after college, a brief stint in the army, and a few years working in New York, he made his way to California to see what the San Francisco Renaissance was all about. After hearing Gary Snyder mention haiku in a discussion of short poetry in 1958, van den Heuvel sought out all the information he could find on the genre. He returned to the East Coast the next year where wrote haiku in isolation, publishing six collections on his own Chant Press, until meeting with the nascent Haiku Society of America in 1971. Discussing haiku with the Society's members—in particular Anita Virgil, Bill Higginson, and Alan Pizzarelli—gave him the opportunity to hone his understanding. In 1974 he published the first edition of *The Haiku Anthology* with

Doubleday, which would go through two further editions at Simon & Schuster and Norton, in both cases expanded. For many current poets this was their first exposure to the genre. He would continue to publish additional collections of his own haiku, most recently *A Boy's Seasons: Haibun Memoirs* in 2010.

In a 2015 interview with Jim Kacian of the Haiku Foundation, van den Heuvel describes a good haiku as being one with an “ontological thrust that seems to put whatever is described in the poem actually before me. It’s almost as if I could knock on it as I might knock on my desk. The poem does so by providing a sensory key: a sound, a visual image, a smell, a taste...”

This search for the right detail is evident in his first collection, *Sun in Skull* (1961), however, for the most part, it wasn’t until *The Window-Washer’s Pail* (1963) that he tightened the focus of his haiku sufficiently. Note the wide focus in the first poem from the first collection, as his attention moves from object to object; instead, in the second, how the focus lingers where the action is.

on the city’s highest window	on the car bumper
dawn stirs	a long landscape
a striped awning	unwinds

A limitation, perhaps, of van den Heuvel’s approach to haiku is that it admits what I call half-haiku, such as:

an empty wheelchair
rolls
in from the waves

This is a powerful poem, a classic in English-language haiku, but where an additional seasonal element usually provides the emotional way in, in this case our feelings of a “wheelchair” alone must do that. This poem is successful because the object has a near-universal feeling, but in a poem such as,

the shadow
of the light chain
swings slowly

our feeling of “shadow”—which will vary in context from reader to reader—must suffice. This same issue will appear later in the one-liner “*the shadow in the folded napkin*”. This intense focus isn’t necessarily a bad thing, just that van den Heuvel sometimes trusts that his emotional response to an object will be the same as a reader’s.

It is tempting to suggest that his encounter with the budding Haiku Society of America caused a dramatic change in style, but I don’t think the facts support that stance. While seasonal elements and clearer cutting made more of an appearance, van den Heuvel’s strength as a poet was always his eye for detail, an insistence on the right language, and his originality. The mid-late 70s and 80s might be considered his mature period, and gives us classics such as:

through
the young leaves
my neighbor’s wife

deserted filing station
snow falls around
the lit gas pumps

shading his eyes
the wooden Indian looks out
at the spring rain

no one home
the refrigerator hums
in the kitchen

Many of his haiku have a theme of quiet loneliness, of objects and people fulfilling their destinies under an impersonal universe, what is sometimes referred to as the Japanese aesthetic *sabi*. This aesthetic is very much in line with that of classic western films.

Van den Heuvel continued to publish quality work, the collection *Dark* in 1982, in which he explored more fully the one-liner, and which includes the “shadow” haiku mentioned above. And in 1991 he produced two additional collections, *The Billboard’s Shadow* and *The Bear’s Den*, both strong, and well-received.

ATTOTFW also includes haiku from his haibun memoir *A Boy's Season* (1993) and *Play Ball* (1999), a collection of haiku on baseball. One from each.

summer afternoon	cold day
the coolness of the newspaper	the traded catcher's
from the grocery bag	empty locker

These and later poems in many ways continue to mine a sense of nostalgia that has always permeated his work, including the title poem below. Yet, they are very much poems of the here and now.

alone
at the top of the ferris wheel
the moon

Van den Heuvel was one of English-language haiku's first voices. In learning of the genre in isolation from any concept of a latter-day community, he managed to avoid the trap of imitating Japanese haiku and their subjects, and has always written in a very American voice on what might be termed Americana. We are grateful to the Haiku Foundation for publishing this important selected works; and grateful to van den Heuvel for his trailblazing. Recommended.

Utopia: She Hurries On, haiku and illustrations by Patricia J. Machmiller (No place [San Jose, Calif.]: Swamp Press, 2017). 55 pages; 5" x 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN: 978-1-64008-048-5. Price: \$15.00 from the author at patriciajmachmiller@msn.com

Reviewed by Deborah P Kolodji

When I contemplate the idea of utopia, I imagine an idyllic pastoral setting filled with cherry blossoms and the music of frogs, crickets, birds, and running water, embodying a stereotype of what some