

*The Tender Between*, by Eve Luckring (Princeton, N.J.: Ornithopter Press, 2018). 90 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-942723-05-9. Price \$16.00 from [www.ornithopterpress.com](http://www.ornithopterpress.com).

*Reviewed by Dan Schwerin*

I remember almost jumping up and down with delight when I read more than one of these poems as they appeared in journals. This is a first collection of intelligent poems assembled in ways that signal the tender between the contours of things and the questions they suggest. Luckring juxtaposes her poems with a selection of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* presented in growing fragments. The title of this 6th century BCE text can be translated as 'the way and its characteristics,' or 'the way and its virtues.' The fragment of the *Tao Te Ching* that Luckring uses comes to ask of both the fragments and the whole: "... are they me or we, the same source but different names?" The poems shimmer with that question.

"Call me Ishmael," mother reads to me in utero

More than twenty-five times in *The Tender Between*, the body is the locus of Luckring's poetry. She reveals how one's body can serve as the text of our poems. As with Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, flesh and blood are where the narrative unfolds. Luckring turns to the body for images that render unfolding understanding of relationships between the natural world and its subset in the human experience.

lily buds —  
a Catholic girl  
engorged with doubt

When this poem and others draw us in to experience the body, they register the seasonal realms of both the natural world and seasons of bodily experience. Perhaps the life of a human being is as suggestive as any of our season words. *The Tender Between* reveals not only the process of spring

and young adult sexuality and doubt as in the above poem, but then onto disillusionment and the ongoing cycles of living our questions.

bleeding under my skin the American Dream

These realms for our writing suggest a thought for January 15th from *A Year of Speculations* by Bob Spiess: “For haiku poets each day is a distinct and individual season.” More than simply a matter of the poet’s voice, we are taken inside a woman’s seasons, and the particular narrative of the female body.

throbbing stars —  
the tilt  
of my pelvis

Crows play an important role in this collection, appearing at least eight times. In one haibun late in the collection, a crow flies into electrical equipment bringing blackout and stoppage—and revealing liminal space and the presence of a trickster. Similar to the call of the crow bringing enlightenment to the 15th century Zen poet Ikkyū, the crow conveys various epiphanies in this collection.

matching  
this black to that black  
crow’s caw

As much as Luckring’s poems traverse the human body, they are not separate from the earth. This collection reminds us the terra firma is not voiceless. If one is allowed several favorites in *The Tender Between*, this is one:

until trees can be landlords

Luckring has spared us the blah blah blah of sleepy haiku constructions. The force of the poem takes us back to the start of it—“until.” Growing

until, living until, resisting until—her fragments allow us room to supply multiple verbs. The poetic vision here calls us into the moral imagination of a reset for the earth—and the beneficence of trees in place of the paper owners, as well as our debt to them. Luckring trusts the images and her readers to our benefit. It is a delight to see a collection comprised of such varied constructions. Consider:

near the horizon  
a wave forms ...  
touch me there, again

This poem unites earth and body, and how did we think it otherwise? Note to poets: think about focus and foreground, sure, but also the use of space, and the power of a well-placed comma in a short poem. The wholes are suggested by the fragments.

shelter in a lit match

As the first poem in the collection, this poem signals the poetry of fragmentary protections, and the little rooms of light in these poems. Many of Luckring's haiku carry reverberations of the implied. This poem begins with the scale of all that is in the word, 'shelter.' Then there is both the smallness of shelter being an attribute of one lit match—but also the enoughness of a match lit and gifting this moment.

The following poem expands the ideas in it by using novel lineation:

as long as the table as long as you want

hunger in the spoon

The length of the line signals the reach of our hungers, echoed in the concave wanting of the spoon.

Luckring's rendering of the fragmentary brings to mind the poet George Garrett, who has a line in a poem that becomes the title of the poem, as well as the title of the whole of his collection: "... days of our

lives lie in fragments.” We are left with partial recollections that are not only fragmentary, but the fragmentary only tells it partly. This is the realm of the haiku poet: we use the shards to signal the shape of our vessels. Luckring nicely juxtaposes a larger fragmentary text that unfolds piece by piece, as meaning develops in each of these fragments that begin the chapters. Only later what is suggested becomes clear, and the *Tao Te Ching* and the poems come to a unity so that by now the reader should be able to answer the question: “These contours, are they me or we, ‘the same source but different names?’” Taken altogether, *The Tender Between* is a very effective collection of poems in wholes and fragments, vessels and flow, in an assemblage in which the title poem names this remarkably:

in the skin of a tiger stalking the tender between

*The Penguin Book of Haiku*, ed. and trans. by Adam L. Kern (United Kingdom: Penguin Random House, 2018). 451 pages; 5" × 7¾". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-140-42476-8. Price: \$18.00 from online booksellers.

*Reviewed by Michele Root-Bernstein*

Let's get something out of the way at the start, shall we? This volume covers premodern Japanese linked verse, mostly up to the year of Shiki's death in 1902. So why is it not titled, *The Penguin Book of Haikai*? To make the point, no doubt, that haiku is not really haiku.

Literary historian Adam Kern draws a careful distinction between haiku (purposefully un-italicized and pronounced “high-coo”) as we know it today and *haiku* (purposefully italicized and pronounced “hah-ee-coo”) as the collaborative linked verse usually called *haikai no renga*. And in a sixty-page introduction to his compilation of newly translated *haikai*