

*Lenard D. Moore and African American Haiku*, by Ce Rosenow (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2022). 89 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; hardcover. ISBN 978-1-7936-5317-8. Price: \$85.00 (\$45.00 Kindle version) from online booksellers.

*Reviewed by Paul Miller*

Over the past decade, several colligate scholars have created a niche market on African-American haiku, mainly on the poets James Emanuel, Etheridge Knight, Sonia Sanchez, and Richard Wright. Later articles have included Lenard D. Moore. Of Emanuel, Knight, and Sanchez, these poets often appear to be cherry-picking from haiku ideas, and it is debatable whether their poems are actually haiku or rather instead haiku-like; and while Wright's haiku are effective, they are too imitative of R.H. Blyth. Moore is the one African-American haikuist in the list perhaps best educated on the genre.

After an introduction that situates Moore within the larger African-American haiku studies, Rosenow's volume collects five of her essays on aspects of Moore's haiku poetics. In the first piece, "Communal Narratives in Haiku Sequences," Rosenow examines Moore's haiku sequences "Desert Storm" and *Gathering at the Crossroads* / "A Million Shadows at Noon" within the African-American storytelling tradition. This tradition is what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. called the "the recurring referent of ... black experience." As we have argued elsewhere, relating to slave narrative haiku, the haiku is an excellent mode to both relate moments of importance, but through its objectivity and immediacy, to also immerse the reader in a participatory fashion into the scene. Of the two sequences, Rosenow writes, "Rather than painting the experiences of African American men with broad strokes, Moore focuses on single moments that will resonate with readers and remain in their memory. At the same time, he uses extended sequences to draw together single moments from multiple perspectives so that the collections don't provide the story of one man but of many, thereby conveying the experience of a group." With her long experience in haiku, Rosenow is one of the best in explaining how some of the haiku in the sequences work individually, while at the same time

creating a larger narrative. It is through these explanations that we see how Moore works as a poet. Yet, while we find the two pieces on the Million Man March a valid expression of “black experience,” “Desert Storm,” with its emphasis on soldiery in general perhaps belongs in a larger military vein void of racial references.

The second essay, “Jazz Poems, Jazz Haiku, and Jazzku,” examines the influence of jazz on Moore’s work—both haiku and longer poems. Rosenow does a fine job illustrating through his longer poems how Moore uses rhythm and sound to create a jazz feel. The haiku, limited as they are spatially, don’t allow room for the longer rhythms, the detours and coming-togethers, and tend to be defined more by the topic of jazz.

quiet rain  
a Coltrane tune I know  
on the radio

This is an essay we would have liked expanded, with forays into his blues haiku as well, which we suspect mine similar territory.

“Ekphrastic Haiku” describes Moore’s longstanding work with other artforms, a minority of those poems are haiku. Several that Rosenow cites reference music as a topic, as in:

on the lead singer’s red robe  
the microphone’s shadow swaying;  
congregation claps

However, these aren’t necessarily in response to a particular work of art, but rather art in general. One better example is her description of Moore’s poetic reaction to Lynette Yiadom-Boakye’s painting “Places to Love For”:

springtime painting:  
a black woman’s bare back  
in the red dress

As she notes, “[t]he descriptor ‘springtime,’ is significant.” Charles Trumbull once broke Ekphrastic haiku into three categories: pure description, subjective response, and “the true essence of the thing, which is not exactly the same thing as reality.” Most of Moore’s Ekphrastic haiku don’t move much beyond the first category.

The essay “Elegiac Haiku” looks at haiku that Moore has written on the death of friends and family. Rosenow digs deep here, and the result is eminently satisfying. The section includes individual haiku and a sequence that Moore wrote upon his father’s passing, and several on his daughter’s death—including what is one of his best-known haiku.

another visit  
to my father’s grave —  
just birdsong

hot afternoon  
the squeak of my hands  
on my daughter’s coffin

Rosenow discusses the healing nature of haiku, in particular Robert Epstein’s work on haiku and loss, in which Epstein suggests, “loss is not something to be gotten over but to be integrated into one’s life.” Moore himself, when discussing the passing of his daughter, revealed the lifesaving nature of poetry when confronted with this trauma, and that same sense of integration. We enjoyed Rosenow’s conclusion in which she noted that “Grounding the poet’s experiences of loss and grief in the natural world through nature images suggests that life and death are both part of nature, which can lead to acceptance and healing.” Moore has had his share of loss and Rosenow does an excellent job of illustrating how that has translated into poetry.

The last essay, “Haibun and an African American Aesthetic,” deconstructs five of Moore’s haibun. In the main, Moore uses the haibun to memorialize his past, both growing up in the rural South, but also of his time as an adult as an educator. Rosenow works to link these poetic biographies to the idea of an African-American storytelling tradition, but also what Toru Kiuchi calls an African-American aesthetic. She claims that this aesthetic is created through “diction, imagery, and the relationship between the prose and the haiku.” This is certainly true in the case of diction and imagery, in which Moore uses the words and slang of his

upbringing, as well as the images of growing up black in the rural south, in his haibun. These combinations give an individualistic feel to what is a lost way of life, and much the way the haiku in his “Desert Storm” and Million Man March sequences do, can act to create a larger group poetry. However, the shape of the haibun themselves and the way the capping haiku link to the prose isn’t much different than other English-language haibun writers—many of whom are not African-American. Of his capping haiku, they are often complementary to the prose and don’t leap in shocking directions. Moore clearly wants the reader’s attention to stay in the scene.

Combined, the book is a good overview of Moore’s career in haiku, with swerves into some of his longer poetry when the themes overlap. Moore is a varied and prolific writer and he has dipped his toes into any number of forms. Yet, many of the themes that drive his larger work are present in his haiku, which Rosenow does a great job of ferreting out. As mentioned above, several volumes of essays have been written on African-American haikuists, however, the quality of their output isn’t on par with many of the best haikuists in what has been called the haiku community. Moore has created a strong oeuvre and we are glad to see him get the attention; we hope other haikuists—regardless of race—will get the same spotlight.

*A Box of Feathers*, by Brad Bennett (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2022). 98 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-958408-03-2. Price: \$20.00 from [www.redmoonpress.com](http://www.redmoonpress.com)

*Reviewed by Jeff Hoagland*

**B**rad Bennett takes the reader for a walk through his environs with his third collection of haiku, *A Box of Feathers*. Through this offering, we visit a variety of settings, from different perspectives, always with a keen sense of observation and the fresh eyes of a student. I took this pocket-sized book with me on walks through my countryside, enjoying it in small sips, along the stream, in the forest, and out in the sunny meadow.