

Though Jeannie Martin manages to bring a laser focus to light, at no point does it become too much. Because she has so carefully organized and structured her poems, *Shaped by the Sun* maintains a freshness and crispness throughout. Each poem is a gem internally lit adding to her story of light. Within the context of this collection even the simplest of haiku becomes a vehicle for an infinity of meanings. I highly recommend *Shaped by the Sun* for its beauty, its depth, and Martin's ability to share with the reader her joy in the light that bathes our earth.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Disclosure(s), by John Martone (No place [Charleston, Ill.]: Tufo, 2022). 167 pages; 4"×6". Matte white card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: Inquire of the author at jpmx@protonmail.com

John Martone, as a poet, redefines what we think we know. He familiarizes himself and the reader with the natural world as in this two-liner: *petals holding / onto a wind*. We are the petals as much as the petals are us holding onto the wind which is as close to capturing the ineffable as any poet might come. He collapses feelings into phrases and further still phrases into a few words. As in this three-worder: *summer is bicycles*. His poems convey a whole way of thinking if not the poet's philosophy: *it's nothing much is all*. There is a confessional tone to many of the poems in *Disclosure(s)* as the title might suggest.. This vulnerability is what makes the work so compelling. *back hoe with no one*. The old saying "We are all in this together" is the overall feeling one might walk away with after reading this book of John Martone's. *sweet pea tendrils / straight from the large / hadron collider*. What could be more opposite than sweet pea tendrils and hadron colliders. The large and the small, the natural and the man-made. Certainly, this prolific poet is a master at wrangling wild words

into a corral of meaning, if only temporarily. Language, Martone seems to convey, is as wild as we are, by nature. Maybe even moreso. *Disclosure(s)* is a delight, allowing the reader to explore the world with “fresh eyes,” as Basho once said. Highly recommended. —pn [Peter Newton]

All My Kind, by John Martone (No place [Charleston, Ill.]: Tufo, 2022). 84 pages; 6"×4." Matte cream card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: Inquire of the author at jpmx@protonmail.com

The prolific, sensitive, and ever-inventive poet John Martone has delivered once again with this latest of his Tufo editions. Martone’s attention is awe-inspiring. Each poem reflects an ordinary everyday observation with such simple, straight-forward language that the reader feels the reverence the poet gives each word. Martone reveals a natural world that he is connected to and a human world he seeks to reconnect with. *merciless wind / more news of war / I write my sister*. Or this one: *distant places — / a light in the house / next door at dawn*. John Martone might be called the Walt Whitman of the haiku world. He embodies all of life, encouraging his readers to do the same by embracing each moment with sensitive and disarmingly simple observations. He draws correlations between the ancient as well as what is right in front of him offering the reader a more poignant scene for having been given the words to see it so clearly. *mausoleum / gate locked / a gingko turns gold*. There is something larger than life about Martone’s poems. He is communing with woodsy nature and outer space, fellow humans and long-gone glaciers. They are “All My Kind” as the title suggests. The work invites multiple readings and provides a comfort the way one returns to an old familiar friend who knows how to listen. *fig tree cutting / in a spice jar of water / sun at the roots*. Martone’s poems regenerate upon each reading. Few poets are more adept at wedding image and emotion. The poems in *All My Kind* are in pursuit of old friends and family members. They are also tributes to the ancient customs and traditions. Highly recommended. *like all my kind / buy a cemetery plot / far from home*. —pn

Catching Mist in the Wind, by Kenneth Francis Pearson (Vail, Ariz.: Scarmora Press, 2022). 67 pages; 4¼"×7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9768543-1-9. Price: \$14.95 from online booksellers.

Beginning with his first poems in *Catching Mist in the Wind*, Pearson is making statements. This first one serves an apt introduction to this particular book: *We are all poets, / who hear the universe cry — / through songs of nature*. Each of the poems adhere to the traditional poetic hallmarks of capitalization and punctuation. They are mostly confined to the 5-7-5 syllabic structure which give many of his observations a forced feel. These poems represent the work of a western style long form poet who has taken up the challenge of writing haiku, or “haikus,” as the book’s cover advertises. The results are pleasing micro-poems that do not necessarily represent the genre of contemporary English-language haiku. *I wish to live free, / where sun touches horizon, / and birds journey home*. These are more poems of aspirations or personal reflections rather than examples of authentic contemporary western haiku. They tell us many profound things but do not enact their own advice. Show don’t tell, as the age-old expression goes among poets of all types. Haiku is, after all, the poetry of suggestions and innuendo. It is the poetry of inclusion and collaboration. In Pearson’s better haiku, the reader is invited to participate in the most subtle of ways. Here, the poet offers heartfelt moments of appreciation that are more suited for a book of daily affirmations. A book for the self-help shelf as well as the poetry shelf. *One day I shall die, / somewhere in the morning dawn, / the rose petals bloom*. —pn

Haiku, by Anthony Di Micco (Canada: RUC Books, 2022). 124 pages; 5½"×8½". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-989504-24-6. Price: \$16.23 from online booksellers.

According to the book’s back cover, “*Haiku* is a book containing poetic reflections, images and feelings, expressed in a modern haiku style.” And the book is indeed a soothing collection of moments of reflection.

Certainly, the poems contained within *Haiku*, a somewhat uninspired book title, are more aptly described as journal entries from outdoor excursions. Each are titled and punctuated, neither grammatical choice is customary in contemporary western haiku. For example, his poem entitled “Thoughts” *Nighttime ... / Hanging my thoughts / on stars to dry*. We applaud the act of exploring the natural world and attempting to transpose these experiences into poetry. However, to call these example of “modern haiku” is a misnomer. They are “haiku moments” rather than fully-formed haiku poems. Worthwhile observations nonetheless. —pn

All the Words Kept Inside, by Mary McCormack (No place: privately printed, 2023). 52 pages; 5¼" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-998171-04-0. Price: \$9.99 from online booksellers.

A haiku and micro-poem collection that chronicles the journey from the poet’s divorce to her eventual independence. The poems move from the shock of a big life change into a self-awareness that offers strength. The strongest poems stand independently of this back story, for example: *black walnuts — / the ground no longer firm / beneath my feet*. However, many of the others in this collection depend on the author’s particular situation to succeed. *what is it / that makes everyone believe / I’m alright?* In context, *All the Words Kept Inside*, functions as one extended sequence of some 78 poems. This is a heartening book that is sure to bolster the confidence of anyone who might be experiencing a similar life trauma. *heading out / on my own / dawn’s first light*. —pn

Only this Step, by Philip Kenney (Georgetown, Ky.: Finishing Line Press, 2023). 30 pages; 5½" × 8½". Four-color matte card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-88838-096-3. Price: \$18.56 from online booksellers.

This haiku collection is an attempt to “have some fun,” according to Kenney in his Introduction. They grew out of the isolation that resulted from

the most recent Covid pandemic and as a remedy for his not being able to finish writing a novel. As with many writers who are new to the writing of haiku, Kenney's poems tend to tell the reader far more than they show the reader. An experienced writer, Kenney's observations are adept enough to provide the raw material from which haiku are made. *Woodpecker drumming / the old Zen Master / wakes from his nap*. Kenney does not fall into the common traps for beginning haiku poets of adhering to the 3-line, 5-7-5 syllabic count. His poems are clearly first-hand experiences from his many nature walks. Kenney sticks to his goal of having fun and why not throw in a lyric from the 1966 hit by the group The Lovin' Spoonful: *What a day / for a daydream— / bumblebee floats by*. Kenney sets a fine example for the writer who wants to slow down and experience the world around us through the senses. With so much raw material here it will be interesting to see where Kenney's haiku path leads him next. —pn

Did You Say Faarbisanj? by Kanchan Chatterjee (India: APK Publishers, 2022). 157 pages; 5½"×8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-92830-17-4. Price: \$6.99 from online booksellers.

Chatterjee's latest book is a novella in haibun form based on the author's experiences over a two-and-a-half year period spent traveling (2016-2019) in the far northern Indian town of Faarbisanj that borders Nepal. Faarbisanj is "a slow-paced place" full of tea stalls and rickshaws, Chatterjee explains, recalling his childhood. He often refers to the contrast between this kind of relaxed way of life to the fast-paced world the author has grown used to in adulthood. The title speaks to the author's sense of humor in that many western readers of this book may never have heard of such a place, much less how to pronounce it. In *How to Haiku*, Bruce Ross writes, "If a haiku is an insight into a moment of experience, a haibun is the story or narrative of how one came to have that experience." Chatterjee's haiku are stand-alone poems that work to enhance the reader's experience by shifting the focus ever-so slightly and to great

effect. In one excursion to Nepal, the author is convinced by a guide to visit a Kumari, which is a human incarnation of a god. After being coaxed into paying for the experience more than once (as an offering) the author ends the day surrounded by tourists. The closing haiku hints at the emotions he is feeling about the changing world and his lost childhood. *cold drizzle ... the hopscotch on the carpark / almost gone*. In his Introduction Chatterjee advises us to read his book as one might listen to a long story over dinner. And the image brings to mind the writing of Isak Dinesen, the Swedish author best known for *Out of Africa*, an account of her life while living in Kenya. Dinesen regales her companions with enthralling tales of her travels and the people and animals she encountered. Similarly, Chatterjee has a gift for storytelling. His style is straight-forward and his tone is inviting, making it a pleasure to relive his richly detailed experiences in northern India and Nepal, while riding on a red rickety Yamaha RX100 motorcycle or some other motorbike. On one of his earlier excursions into Nepal he says: "If you're a hippie at heart, you're going to love Nepal." Followed by the capping haiku *pilgrim's trail... / in my backpack, a mala / made of yak bones*. A footnote explains that a "mala" is the name for prayer beads. *Did You Say Faarbisanj?* is an epic journey in the vein of Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* in that it serves as both a travelogue and a spiritual journey that the author undertakes. The prose is full of sensory experiences. The sights and sounds of people he meets and the many exotic dishes which are really just what the local cuisine happens to be. One can almost smell the turmeric and curry. These haibun are also filled with folk tales and myths where spirits live in trees and wishes are granted if one catches a thrown flower. Chatterjee conveys an enchanting world and shows it to us with clarity and a sense of nostalgia for his childhood. He reveals a world where everything seems to be in sync. Even the dripping faucet in his room becomes the metronome by which he repeats the Green Tara mantra in his mind as he falls asleep, "Om Tare Tuttare Turey Soha." If one never travels to the region that Chatterjee explores in this fine collection, he has provided a beautiful and poignant account. Well worth the trip. —pn

The Photograph as Haiku, by M.H. Rubin (No place: Lulu, 2022). 76 pages; 9"×7". Glossy black and white card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN Price: \$26.98 from www.lulu.com

Using fine examples of masterful haiku and photographs M.H. Rubin delivers an exceptional book with *The Photograph as Haiku*. In simple straight-forward statements Rubin reminds us that while haiku poets have to contend with numerous rules they also strive to create an organic feel to their poems in their completed form. For example:

“one of the key features of a haiku is that there are two uneven parts, a big one and a small one. The small one provides a little surprise, or counterpoint, that changes something about how you feel about the big one.”

He shows us how to walk the line of seeing the world between happenstance and harmony. He explores the overlapping techniques and principles of haiku and photography. His observations are eloquently written by someone who has clearly studied both of these artistic forms over a number of years. With an inviting tone, Rubin’s is the voice of a patient and experienced teacher who also wants to explore, experiment, and have fun. Each brief chapter begins with a haiku by Basho, Issa, or one of their students by way of example and a reminder of what we are talking about here which is art and creativity and imagination. Rubin draws the parallel between haiku and photography as different forms of expression that share the same guiding principle—the art of subtraction. What words are left out of a haiku? What is visible just outside the frame of the photograph? In many ways that is what the poet and the photographer are in pursuit of—those in-between scenes that once set down in words or frozen in a photographic image they make the reader or viewer feel something they had not felt before. *The Photograph as Haiku* is an excellent book for the beginning haiku poet as well as a welcome reminder for the more seasoned poet. Both will be rewarded with new ways of seeing art. Rubin knows his audience and speaks directly to the student, the poet, and the photographer at whatever level they may be at. Highly recommended. —pn

Tales of the Kite, by Adjei Agyei-Baah (No place: Buttonhook Press, 2023). 72 pages; ebook. No ISBN. Free download at <https://ojalart.com/buttonhook-press2023-chapbook-seriespoetry-all-forms-styleshai-kuadjei-agyei-baahtales-of-the-kite/>

102 kite-themed haiku in English and Twi, the main dialect of Ghana. As might be expected of such a large collection on a single theme, the haiku are a bit of a mixed bag. Too many themes repeat, as in *kite— / half of a child / skyborne* and *soaring kite ... / the fluttering urge / in a child's arms*. Some poems only reside intellectually, as in: *flaccid wind / a kite's ego / deflating* and *heading to the sky ... / a kite dreams / of altitude*. But other poems fly well and let the reader share the joy that a kite as topic can produce. Two favorites: *a tree / with ribbon— / kite!; still waving on top / of the lost incumbent's billboard— / a stuck kite*. —pm [Paul Miller]

Pressing Matters, by Caroline Giles Banks (Minneapolis, Minn.: Wellington-Giles Press, 2023). 69 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9645254-9-8. Price: \$12.00 from online booksellers.

Haiku, Senryu, and haibun written in response to, as the author puts it, “the coronavirus pandemic, accelerating changes in the natural environment due to climate change, and worldwide social unrest.” A heady batch. Most of the standalone poems feel like senryu, making their point and then closing, such as the racially-aware: *dealt the white card / wanting to play / just hearts*. Or: *dry spell / no ripples / in the frog pond*. It could be argued that much of contemporary haiku and senryu avoid these hard topics, so Banks is to be applauded for the risk she takes. At the same time, we feel that the short poem's size doesn't always allow for nuance or full exploration, so a poem can come off as naïve or judgmental. The haibun describe in more detail the author's musings on the aforementioned topics, ask questions, and probe points of view. A collection worth checking out. *pipeline nixed First Peoples dance to the sun; hanging on / the rearview mirror / face mask*. —pm

Night Owl Haiku, by Robert Epstein and David H. Rosen (No place: privately printed, 2023). 105 pages; 6"×9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-376960-45-5. Price: \$12.00 from online booksellers.

Epstein and Rosen, both mental health professionals, have been friends for over a decade. This collaboration is made up of pairs of poems, in which one of them would compose a poem to which the other would respond. However Epstein's poems are all presented first, which gives the illusion that Rosen is always the respondent. Despite the introduction's insistence that the respondent didn't purposely "mirror" their partner, the poems are nearly always similar in theme. An obvious example: *long winter night — / in the kitchen / ants searching too* (Epstein); *In the kitchen / looking for what? cookies?* (Rosen). Of the two poets, Epstein writes more in an established haiku tradition. Rosen's work is enjoyable and often thought-provoking, but too often his haiku consist of statements. Still, the collection does a fine job of illustrating the friendship and humor between the two men. A few more: *already up / the earthquake still / rattles me* (Epstein); *This night owl is up, but no earthquake ... / yet* (Rosen). *spring runoff— / I too shall be / released* (Epstein); *Life is not / a river, rather / a seasonal creek* (Rosen). —pm

Weathered Clapboard, by Elliot Nicely (Windsor, Conn.: Buddha Baby Press, 2023). 12 pages; 4¼"×2¾". Matte black and yellow card covers; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. Price: \$3.00. Inquire of the author at elliottnicely@yahoo.com

A small collection of nine haiku. We have a fondness for these small books, whose true size is deceptive. The poems, in Nicely's case, describe a day on the prairie, but hint at much larger things. There is a nice cohesiveness to the collection and so much life in these simple observations. With so few poems, we don't want to overshare, so two: *asking one more time ... / the breadth / of a prairie dawn; low-hanging sun the pregnant heifer's gait*. Recommended. —pm

Serendipity, by Robert Witmer (India: Cyberwit, 2023). 100 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-95224-52-9. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

A full collection of haibun and standalone haiku and senryu, mixed with quotes on a variety of subjects by a variety of poets and philosophers. The haibun memorialize boots-on-the-ground travels Witmer has taken over several decades through Asia, and into Japan where he would eventually settle and live. They are full of observations, history, and philosophical questions; the capping or inserted haiku grounding. Enjoyable, and we wanted more of them. Mixed between these are strings of haiku in thematic groupings that range from everyday nature to pointed senryu. A few favorites by theme: *light on the last leaves / little birds / that stay* (Mother Nature); *washing up / on an island paradise / plastic plates* (Once Bereft); *new girl at school / his perfect snowball / melting in her hands* (Love is blind). Overall, a fine outing. —pm