

An invigorating sense of discovery pervades this book. The butterflies and melting snow at the highest elevations come as a surprise both to the boy in the story and to readers. Other creatures mentioned in the poems include bobcats, marmots, red-tailed hawks, and ravens, along with such regional trees as mountain hemlock and Sierra lodgepole pine. Rounding out the book is a list of hiking essentials (such as GPS, a first-aid kit, *and* a notebook for writing haiku), together with information on the area's geology and an educational history of the South Sister volcano. This is a gently inspiring book about haiku hiking, but also practical and informative—and beautiful to look at. Come along, indeed!

*Overpacked for the Afterlife*, by David M. Boyer (No place [Stamford, Conn.]: Privately printed, 2023). 103 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7325087-7-4. Price: \$6.99 from online booksellers.

*Sea Change: An Anthology of Single-Line Poems*, eds. Kat Lehmann and Robin Smith (Wilmington, Del.: Whiptail Press, 2024). 97 pages; 8¼" × 8¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-951675-10-3. Price: \$15.00 from their partner [www.redmoon-press.com](http://www.redmoon-press.com)

*Reviewed by Paul Miller*

I am always excited to read submissions from David M. Boyer. He is an imaginative, thought-provoking, and witty writer. However, I must confess to struggling sometimes as the editor of a haiku journal to discern how his work fits into the haiku tradition. His new collection is a mix of formats: two-line, three-line, with the majority being one-liners. A few favorites:

the little well by your clavicle  
leaves falling already

for him who still believes in hands this branch  
 night shift at the poison factory a radio set to static  
 animals you see only when they die shorter days

These poems have a clear two-part structure and work in haiku's traditional way with energy sparking between them. That said, there has been a trend of late for uncut haiku that, for lack of a better term, I might call "imaginative statements." An example is this enjoyable poem by Boyer:

which body part is the moon tonight

The poem still contains two disparate images (the idea of a body part and a moon) so the poem isn't solely a declarative statement, but rather an open one that has room for a reader to resolve. Other similar sentence-like poems however don't have the same room to explore. Poems such as this seem to be missing a second part.

tiny flies furiously scrub a knife of light

This is an interesting image and it is enjoyable to picture the tiny flies at their task. However I'm not sure what the abstract "knife of light" is and more importantly for the editor of a haiku journal, how it is a haiku. Rather it is a statement, and my initial reaction is to say, "Cool, and?"

As might be expected of a writer who delights in creative combinations, a number of the poems lean into abstractions that can feel obtuse.

the small hours like crystals into birdsong

by chance producing a goblin prince for export

These poems are fun to read and ponder, but I struggle to settle on any firm meaning. That may be the point, but some kind of sharing or communication seems desirable if you are sharing these poems with a wider

audience. These kind of abstractions grow more frequent as the book progresses. The last of the book's three sections includes poems like the following. Again, I feel the need to stress, these are enjoyable sentences and fun to roll around the mind, but I am not convinced they are haiku. And ultimately, despite their creativity, I want more. I want to be able to do more than have an imaginative picture; I want meaning.

stranger's music through the wall delete more of the plot

excised from your neck the last thing your dead sibling said

For a journal of haiku such as ours, the question of whether something is or isn't haiku seems appropriate to ask; the question seems moot when enjoying the collected poems on their own.

*Sea Change*, from the editors of the online journal *Whiptail*, mines similar territory. The anthology showcases one-line poems, mostly horizontal, but a few vertical, from the first seven issues of the journal. The poems are presented one to a page with no author attribution until an index at the end.

Of the two collections, its poems are more in line with current ELH practice than perhaps Boyer's. Still, there are a few poems that seem too personal for most readers to truly inhabit.

trying to excavate the owl from my father's well of forgetfulness

*Jo Balistreri*

flying turkeys in the room she calls hers

*Margaret Walker*

These are what I called "imaginative statements" above, and I have the same issues with them. Walker's poem, for example, could be about real, metaphorical, or imaginative turkeys. The problem is that I don't know which. Real seems unlikely, or else lots of practical information has been

left out of the poem, which is a problem in itself; and while metaphorical or imaginary turkeys are fun to ponder it seems like only Walker or the “she” in the poem understands their significance.

That said, the majority of the anthology’s poems fit nicely into what ELH readers are used to reading in contemporary journals. A few favorites:

the warmth of whispers under covers midwinter

*Rich Shilling*

even without her sparrows

*Arvinder Kaur*

mariposa syllables flit out of my mouth

*Scott Wiggerman*

One of the strengths of the one-line form is its ability to place normally isolated phrases against others, which in turn create new and exciting pairings (“mariposa syllables”!). The form also allows a poem multiple meanings based upon multiple readings, depending upon where the poem cuts; for example “even without her / sparrows” vs. “even without / her sparrows.”

The anthology contains a nice mix of serious and playful poems, including these vertical offerings:

behind

in front of

behind

the doe

the fawn

*Mary Stevens*

magnolias  
dripping  
even  
after

a  
day

a  
day

*Kati Mohr*

To suggest, as the anthology's title does, that poems such as these are heralds of a new beginning in the larger haiku community is misleading. The majority of poets in the haiku community still write in the normative three-line form with a clear grammatical or punctuation break. Such "traditional" haiku can be just as enjoyable, humorous, and thought-provoking. But there are some poets, such as the contributors to *Whiptail*, who are looking beyond that structure to see how haiku's traditions and aesthetics can be expanded—or simply played with. These are welcome explorers. A deeply enjoyable volume.