
REVIEWS

The Rain Sweeps Through, by John Brandi (Chimacum, Wash.: Empty Bowl Press, 2023). 88 pages; 5" × 7". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-9883701-3-0. Price: \$18.00 from www.emptybowl.org

Reviewed by Mike Dillon

John Brandi is a considerable talent. Writer, artist, poet, teacher, lecturer and traveler, haiku has been part of his creative practice for four decades.

Born in 1943, the New Mexico resident is the author of more than twenty books and recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Brandi made his way to the Bay Area literary scene after a stint in the Peace Corps in the late 1960s; his open-road, Beat-inflected commitment to the creative life reflects part of the post-World War II American literary tradition by way of the Pacific Rim. The list of Brandi's awards and bona fides is long; praise for his work from writers and poets who know their craft is sharp and clear.

Brandi's newest offering, *The Rain Sweeps Through*, a handsome, modestly sized book enlivened by his fanciful pen and ink illustrations, features ninety-nine haiku and senryu. Along the way, we encounter a Blakean eye for detail—the universe-in a grain of sand—and Basho's karumi, or lightness of touch:

Who are you?
the mirror
never stops

Turning the compost
and into it
my shadow

A bath under the stars
 all burdens
 to the breeze

If the reader senses intimations of mortality here, Brandi's Afterword tells us why: he is battling metastatic melanoma. Following a series of immunotherapy treatments, "I had calmer times," he writes, "enabling work on the design of *The Rain Sweeps Through* and also providing the chance to contemplate what haiku means to me beyond its obvious merits."

Serious illness tends to narrow one's view. Sometimes, for Brandi, the view opens out:

All morning
 wander the cosmos
 without leaving the garden

A handful of Brandi's entries are more social commentary or aphoristic than haiku or senryu, and occupy that "not quite" zone, as *Modern Haiku* editor Robert Spiess used to put it in his rejection slips.

Not who you know
 but how you
 know who

Even on these occasions, though, Brandi is never boring. His work is the fruition of a hard-won inner knowing, from where his haiku, senryu, and yes, sometimes aphoristic three liners, spring to vivid life. As the *Dhammapada* has it: with our minds we make the world. All told, Brandi most often hits the mark, and the payoffs resonate:

Dry ravine
 in every bolder
 the shape of water

Stillness
 in the far corner of the room
 fills with light

There are moments of *mono no aware*—glimpses of transient beauty:

Moving over
to let the moon
fill the bed

All summer pulling weeds
regret not learning
their names

And there are moments that might put a catch in one's throat:

Now they are mine
my father's thin arms
lifting the rain bucket

In the crooked mirror
my face
finally straight

Shorter daylight
only adds
to my shortening days

The last paragraph of the Afterword is worth quoting in full, for its linguistic zest, fidelity to the world, and flash of the haiku spirit: "Living with cancer, healing from cancer, even dying from it does not necessarily influence the haiku poet to contemplate a new meaning to the haikai world—because the world is timeless within one's given time. There is always the vastness, the upside-down raven at play between the dust devils spinning across the mesa. There is always intimacy, that bead of sun moving on the back of the housefly on the windowsill. The haiku mind is tuned to both worlds, alert to what either might deliver."

Climbing the Volcano, by Curtis Manley, with illustrations by Jennifer K. Mann (New York: Neal Porter Books, 2024). 48 pages; 11¼" × 8¼". Glossy full-color card covers; hardback. ISBN 978-0-8234-5166-1. Price: \$18.99 from booksellers.

Reviewed by Michael Dylan Welch

Curtis Manley's *Climbing the Volcano* is a rare children's book from a mainstream publisher that gets haiku right. But this is no surprise when Curtis is a longtime member of Haiku Northwest. No trivial