

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Length of One Breath Haiku Now, by Jeannie Martin (Windsor, Conn.: Buddha Baby Press, 2024). 51 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: \$15.00 from the author at 75 Norwood Ave, Newton Centre, MA 02459.

Martin has written an introduction to haiku that is both welcoming and informative. In many ways this is a collection of her haiku, separated into sections, each section speaking to a different part of her haiku practice. Martin has led haiku workshops and retreats for over twenty years, so she has much to offer. Yet she offers the knowledge casually, suggestion-like, never dictatorially, with sections such as "The Haiku Moment," "A Quiet Mind," "Enjoy the Interconnection," plus sections for each of our five senses, to name but a few. There are many ways to enter a haiku practice, and many books to act as door; this is a gentle, welcoming one. A few favorite poems: *step-step-stepping / into the sunlight / centipede; car ride home / turning off the radio / to see the moon.*

Faunistics, by R.C. Thomas (United Kingdom: Privately printed, 2024). 135 pages; 5" × 8". Matte blue and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-399968-73-7. Price: \$12.69 from online booksellers.

Haiku on the fauna of our world's seven continents, each poem on a different animal. Some of the haiku are a little too of the intellect, such as *squeezing out / every last detail ... / anaconda's muscle memory*, and others fall a bit flat: *reflecting on its tree climbing tree weta*. But others display a good balance for the here-and-now of each creature. Readers will find themselves looking up names such as chevrotain, oilbird, water monitor, quokka. The poems are paired with the author's simple ink drawings of animal tracks, planets, leaves, etc. Two favorites: *a breeze / through the long grass / white tips of goats' ears; sun and sky / sewn together / a macaw drapes its wings.*

Four Season Farm, by Jeremy Haworth (United Kingdom: Alba Publishing, 2023). 96 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Glossy green and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-912773-56-5. Price: €16.00 from www.alba-publishing.com

Ninety haibun detail the poet's life living and learning on an Irish farm. Arranged as a calendar year, the haibun don't have titles, so much as dates. They are enjoyable to sink into, and equally so to follow Haworth's journey with the various chores of the seasons. It would be easy for a farmer to overshare, to bog the haibun down with pointless details in the name of authenticity; Haworth instead picks the lean details, the right ones, and the always-capping haiku never feel explanatory or distant. A good first collection.

Unmended Fences, by Carolyn Hall (United Kingdom: Snapshots Press, 2023). 28 pages; ebook. No ISBN. Free from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

Nineteen haiku by one of our strongest practitioners. The poems have a thematic narrative, illuminating small moments of crisis, from *cold morning moon / a speck of blood / in the yolk*, to *shiva / for one so young / evening star*. In between, the poems become earthbound, people-bound, and we experience a sense of the universal creative and destructive that's outside Hall's control. A strong showing.

Eira, by Lew Watts (United Kingdom: Snapshot Press, 2023). 108 pages; 5" × 7¾". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-903543-56-6. Price: \$28.00 from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

Thirty-eight haibun connected by thematically similar haiku, the whole a wonderfully loose barstool memoir of growing up poor in Wales, his emigration to the States, later success, marriages, and his own family. Yet despite Watts' adult accomplishments, he can't quite escape his childhood. Family members in one haibun resurface in later haibun, his past

informing his present, all of it in an authentic voice that only someone who had lived it could relate. Of interest is the complex relationship he has with his parents, real relationships that shift haibun to haibun from pride to fear to shame; these are alternatively heartwarming and heart-breaking. Watts' unflinching honesty gives the haibun their depth and the editorial focus on theme gives the volume a cohesion missing in many haibun collections. Not wanting to give away too much in a review, but the final piece left us gutted. As co-author with Roberta Beary and Rich Youmans of the recent and rightly-lauded *Haibun: A Writer's Guide*, we expect Watts to know what he is doing, and he doesn't disappoint. One of the best haibun collection we've ever read. Recommended.

To Tower Above Me Still, by Robert Epstein (No place [Calif.]: Privately printed, 2024). 126 pages; 5" × 8". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-872512-56-1. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

A new collection from one of our most prolific haikuists. The poems are all written by Epstein at his beloved Corte Madera Creek Park in Greenbrae, California. Through 115 haiku, Epstein explores his surroundings and how their creative energies relate to himself. The poems are paired with photographs and drawings; the drawings don't add much but the photos give a sense of the park. *my mother gone— / sunlight in the folds / of a pine cone; leaves leaves leaves that's what we are.*

The Dancing Mountains, by Peter Barnes (No place [Calif.]: Barnes and Noble Press, 2024). 43 pages; 4" × 6". Glossy black and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 237-0-015-66800-6. Price: \$8.00 from the author at vgbarnes@hotmail.com

A slim volume of thirty-one haiku. Barnes is careful with his use of language, which most often pays off. The early part of the volume is the strongest. Two favorites: *sleepless night — / somewhere a dog / bays for me;*

after a day of blasting / for the highway / the songs of frogs. Although all of his poems find the constant creative in the world, later poems flag a bit, and he includes two with overt similes that don't quite work, including the title poem. *if awakened, the mountains / like barons would / surely dance.* Overall, an enjoyable collection.

Off the Main Road: Six Contemporary Haiku Writers, eds. David Jacobs & Andrew Shimield (United Kingdom: Alba Publishing, 2024). 92 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Matte yellow and black card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-912773-60-2. Price: £12.00 from www.albapublishing.com

An anthology from a competition in search of haiku talent that has not yet published an individual collection. The organizers set a strict limit of six finalists from the one-hundred fifty submissions. The winners each given a brief bio and space for twenty-four haiku. Not surprising in this day of extensive haiku publishing opportunities—print, online, and competition—most of the names will be familiar. Nice variety in both experience, voice, and style. A favorite from each: *in the bittern hide / the resident bore / unscrews his thermos* (David Weston); *spring stream / she lifts the saree / just enough* (Meera Rehm); *honeymoon over / a padlock rusting on a bridge / in france* (Steve Black); *returning geese / a few more pebbles / on her headstone* (John Pappas); *ice cream truck— / the swing swings / by itself* (Mary Ann Conley); *loan application / the chain / on the bank's pen* (Nick Hoffman).

Milkweed: Selected Haiku & Senryu Alexis Rotella, eds. Randy & Shirley Brooks (Taylorville, Ill.: Brooks Books, 2024). 156 pages; 6¼" × 9¼". Matte four-color card covers; Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-929820-30-5. Price: \$30.00 from www.brooksbookshaiku.com

Rotella has been a steady presence in English-Language haiku and senryu for nearly fifty years, serving as HSA President, *Frogpond* editor, and honorary curator of the American Haiku Archive ... to name but a few

important roles she has played. However, her greatest role has been that of poet, and we are grateful to Brooks Books for bringing out this career (until now) retrospective. Rotella has often been labeled a writer of psychological haiku and senryu, indeed she was one of the first to write haiku that focused on interpersonal relationships (see her wonderful 1984 collection, *After the Affair*) and much of her work is in this vein, but such labels mask the wider range of her work. The poems are arranged, with a few exceptions, in order of publication. This reader would have liked further context concerning this arrangement, such as year of publication or collection name, or both, to better illustrate the timeline of Rotella's long haiku career. Like most writers, Rotella has over the years revised some of her previously published work; these and new edits were made on the poems in *Milkweed*. While Rotella has worked in other forms, such as tanka, haibun, and haiga, the current volume only contains her haiku and senryu. A good chance to revisit her large corpus, including both the classics and lesser knowns. *Late August / I bring him the garden / in my skirt; Posing seductively / under the lilac / my mother at my age*. Recommended.