

**Scott Metz.** *lakes & now wolves*. Lincoln, IL: Modern Haiku Press, 2012, 61 pp., perfect softbound, 5.5 x 8. ISBN 978-0-9741894-9-9, US\$15 <[www.modernhaiku.org](http://www.modernhaiku.org)>.

by Francine Banwarth, Dubuque, Iowa

I have always been drawn to the haiku of Scott Metz. I admire the imaginative awareness of language through which he experiments inside and outside the boundaries of the art form:

lakes  
& now wolves  
entering Pegasus

To begin, I want to enter this poem through the words and how they are arranged on the page: five words, one ampersand, ten syllables, each carrying its own weight. There is nothing extra here and nothing is wasted. There is rhythm in the lines, and with that rhythm, conveyed emotion, something I can sink my teeth into. But what does it mean, if a poem should mean? Why lakes, why wolves, hinged on that ampersand, and why are they “entering Pegasus”? Pegasus is the winged horse that, by definition in Merriam-Webster’s, “causes the stream Hippocrene to spring from Mount Helicon with a blow of his hoof.”<sup>1</sup> The image portrays power, fluidity, the life-giving essence of water. A second definition given for Pegasus is “poetic inspiration,” the wellspring of creativity. And a third tells me that Pegasus is “a northern constellation near the vernal equinoctial point,” *vernal* referring to the season of spring. On the literal level, are lakes and wolves preparing themselves for the advent of spring? On the subliteral level, is the poet himself entering a season of rebirth, of awakening, of a new awareness and opportunity to explore his inner and outer landscapes?

Interesting, too, is the fact that this collection is arranged in three parts: *lakes*, *&*, and *now wolves*. In an enlightening introduction by Philip Rowland we learn that the first section “lakes” features more conventional, season/nature-oriented haiku:

end of summer  
pressing her body against  
the sea wall

the fox returns  
with my answer . . .  
autumn leaves

Each of these contains a seasonal reference (summer/autumn), a creature presence (her/fox/my), and a symbol of the human and natural worlds (sea wall/leaves). Each portrays and conveys a sense of longing, of seasons and relationships. What does one do with the summer body when summer ends, and who is doing the pressing here? What are the universal questions we seek answers to as one season gives way to another?

Part two opens with “&” and its reflection, as if we are seeing it mirrored on the surface of a lake. Rowland suggests that the poems contained herein might be considered “transitional in the progress of his work, or as an interlude of sorts.” Thirty-six of the forty-five poems are delivered in one line, a form that allows for “sudden disjunction and the play of ambiguity.”

meadow speaking the language she dreams in  
spring night the pines share something private  
under my skin a pasture with one tree  
am i the one who’s darkening plums

I find in these lines a complexity and an intricacy in juxtaposition. One word leads us to another, and another, until the poem comes out whole, true to experience and conceptualization. Real or imagined, these moments resonate with me in the light and in the darkness contained within, and I sense a seamlessness and circularity there in the spirit of play that Rowland suggests: *under my skin a pasture with one tree under my skin . . . ; am i the one who’s darkening plums am i the one who’s darkening . . .*

Seventy-three poems in the last section “now wolves” continue to stretch our haiku sensibilities and, as Rowland suggests, “deviate further from the norms of syntax, punctuation and lineation.” In the progression of this collection, we enter a transition in which “it is important to note Metz’s growing interest in Japanese modernist and cutting-edge, contemporary (*gendai*) haiku. . . .” Poems of this caliber, with roots in

classical and modern Japanese haiku poetics, often challenge the reader to expand his or her haiku horizon, to expect allusion and intrigue, to enter with an open mind and heart, and to experience the power and mystery of word and image:

where my squid-hearts	like a mosquito
beat	or an old empire
pale, fragile blossoms	city night

from last week but that only happens inside stars.

Read these lines out loud to feel the rhythm and pace, to hear the richness of the language. Explore the associations. In the first haiku, for example, squid ink is used to draw tattoos, poems are written in ink, blossoms will bear fruit if pollinated, the heart is quickening. Could the poem represent a time of fragility and possibility in the artist's life?

There are haiku in the last section that connect us with nature through fresh and surprising imagery:

spring	
like	in the basement
a scale that's come off	of a snowflake
	blackbird and i
earth	

And those that connect us with wolf nature, political and anti-war poems:

the double	
image of	
a	here's a feather
small	stuck to the sky or
cocoon	is it your blood
held	

@ gunpoint

the war awakens the face of an insect in the mirror

Often when we are reading haiku we can't look up from the page and ask the poet why certain words and images were chosen, what the true intent was in writing the poem, or what the poet hopes the reader will take from the poem. But if we can gain insight into a poet's creative process and what lies behind the scenes of his or her passion for the craft, we may more fully understand a poet's body of work.

In 2007 *Modern Haiku* published "The Haiku of Scott Metz" in its "Spotlight" feature.<sup>2</sup> He began writing haiku in 1997 and ten years later was asked to share his poetic view:

I was attracted most by their brevity, their oddness (of subjects and images), and their sense of darkness and loneliness as well as their ability to convey the deeply subjective within the objective (from and out of images). . . . Two aspects of haiku especially interest me, free verse or freestyle haiku and haiku of the imagination. . . . I'm also interested in the playfulness of language in haiku, those words and phrases and slang that make English unique and that can be used to engage the reader.

Metz's haiku are not crafted according to any one definition of the art form. His poems fall all along the bell curve of haiku, with language and images that resonate out and beyond that curve. *lakes & now wolves* is a collection to be read, studied, and savored, one that will awaken, inspire, deepen, and broaden our haiku sensibilities.

certain now i am somewhere among the dawn    bird    notes

#### Notes

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., p. 913.
2. *Modern Haiku* 38.3, pp. 81–82.