

Pilgrimage by Michael Dudley (2017, Red Moon Press, Winchester VA). 150 pages, 6×9", perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271. Wood Engravings by Wesley W. Bates. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

Reviewed by Nick Avis

Michael Dudley's poetry has been widely published since the mid-1970s and widely appreciated by poets and critics alike. This is an expanded version of an earlier edition from 2005, containing 400 poems or verses, some of which are in sequences. The range of subject matter, emotion, form and content is wide and varied. Dudley's poetry is playful, humorous, lyrical and at times musical. He uses every sound technique, including rhyme quite extensively, and makes free use of all western poetic devices. The layout on the page, the variety of line and spatial arrangements of the poems and Dudley's use of an array of concrete poetics make this a unique visual experience.

Every poem, we are told, is a haiku when well over half of them are not; and humour is prevalent throughout this book. Shiki emphasized, in order to distinguish haiku from senryu and other related verses, that "The haiku is not... a form of humour" (*Masaoka Shiki*, Beichman, 1982).

Many of Dudley's amusing, ironic and oftentimes whimsical quips are not really poems at all and have little or no life of their own. Since his ability to sequence and juxtapose poems is quite exceptional, these lighter poems or verses usually work well in context but not as often as they should: *blind date: / her mutt / humps my leg; laying down rip-rap / we sing a song / of knick-knack; keep walking / keep talking / keep warm*. The first is one of dozens of momentary light-hearted senryu with no context. The second and third are not poems and could be renga verses but the second one, of which there are too many, also has no context. The third is originally from a very fine sequence entitled "On Strike" in which it works well as a stanza. "On Strike" is an autumn sequence, so even this otherwise weak or failed poem

has a political and human story behind it, and is set against the harsher side of autumn with winter coming and no end in sight.

Too many of Dudley's poems are mere observations without any objective correlative (senryu) or seasonal reference (haiku) to take you outside of the purely subjective perception of the poet. I used to call these halfku because half the poem is missing. These five are from a sequence of eleven entitled "New-born": *she looks at me / for the first time / cross-eyed; suckling / tiny ears / wagging; my poor girl vomits / the cat / laps it up; poo check: Nope, / just a fart!; between bottles / she & I hold a / belching contest.*

If you edit out the weak and problematic poems, what is left is a very fine collection with some outstanding and extraordinary work, which is why Dudley is one of our finer poets. Haiku publications by single authors are rarely, if ever, edited in the true sense of the word, and this is one of them. Everyone needs an editor.

Much of Dudley's poetry is meant to be performed—all poetry is really:

Big Mac Attack another acre c l e a r c u t

In this concrete senryu, one of many environmental poems, the one-liner is the horizon. Dudley replaces quotation marks with italics, which are cleaner and visually less intrusive, but the difference in the print and the use of capital letters visually separate the culprit from the victim so to speak, and the italicised letters tilt towards "another acre" as if charging at it. The capital letters make the culprit bigger and more intimidating. In the first line an iconic phrase is given a whole new meaning with a sudden change in perspective—the haikai twist. Dudley uses space to indicate the rhythm and pace of the poem, which slows down and disintegrates in the last phrase emphasizing disbelief, fear or even horror. The capital letters in the first phrase mean it should be read louder than the other two and the voice trails off towards the end. The spaces between the letters suggest an image of the clearcutting. Throughout this book Dudley varies font and size; uses upper and lower case, bold or italics; and creatively uses

space effectively and imaginatively, all of which, as in this case, adds greatly to the poem, if not makes it one. The danger with concrete poetics, however, is that they can become too intrusive, especially with haiku, but Dudley, for the most part, avoids this pitfall. Besides, most of the poems are not haiku.

Another concrete technique that Dudley uses is a variation on the acrostic which creates a second image. In the first haiku, which is exceptional to begin with, the addition of the rain greatly enhances the mood of the poem, and the life-giving rain of spring compares and contrasts with the crucifixion and the resurrection and the deadly implications of our unlimited access to weapons. Dudley, however, does not make any judgment but reminds us that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. The second haiku, on the face of it, is a very basic nature sketch, and would not even be a poem without the second image.

Easter Monday still the gun shop OPEN ALL DAY

from cloud to cloud silently

Despite my grief with this book, it is a lot of fun to read and I highly recommend it. To end, here are two more of Dudley's best poems. Note the creative use of the period in both, including its absence at the end of the second poem implying silence, stillness, openness and something the poet cannot let go of:

A daughter, he answers,
 then looks to the moon.
Stillborn.

beep.by.beep.
 I.delete.all.of.her.
 messages. but one