

*Poetry as Consciousness: Haiku Forests, Space of Mind, and an Ethics of Freedom* By Richard Gilbert, Illustrated by Sabine Miller, 2018. 294 pages, 5 ½ x 8", published by Keibunsha, Co. LTD. ISBN978-4-86330-189-4. \$38.00 direct from author poetry.as.consciousness@gmail.com

Reviewed by David G. Tilley

*Poetry as Consciousness (PaC)* requires concentration on the part of the reader; contemplation of the book's contents over an extended period is best. While the book contains many haiku, it is intended neither as a collection of haiku (though there are 216 in the book), nor as a *How To* book, nor as an introductory primer on the haiku form. We know from Gilbert's *The Disjunctive Dragonfly (TDD)* (a book I keep going back to over the years), that Gilbert is challenging and yet well worth the effort. While TDD is a small book of 132 (5.25x7.5) pages, *Poetry as Consciousness* is more than twice that length and covers more terrain. TDD focused on the notion of disjunction, particularly within the haiku genre, *PaC* sets out to explore and map "thoughtspace" tackling along the way *mind* (both philosophically and psychologically), *cognitive poetics*, and the *freedom to create*. Reading this book is not on the order of Heidegger, but it is on the order of Carl Jung or more closely, James Hillman in the realm of poetics and creativity. For those who have not delved into TDD, fear not, there is a several page adapted excerpt in the back of *PaC*, and even that is not required for reading *PaC* which stands on its own.

*Poetry as Consciousness* comes to us in six parts, the first five of which, lay out Gilbert's "manifesto on poetic imagination as soulful inhabitation." It's a lot to get through before hitting any haiku, but do not be daunted, press on. It is easy to get a bit lost as one reads through these five sections given the broad range of topics seen from the perspectives of various *ologies*, and to wonder "just where is he going?" He introduces many terms which can keep one trying to remember definitions. Happily, it's not like Heidegger who constantly invents words. At one point, I made a mind map of the Table of Contents just to keep the topology of the book in mind as I went along.

Gilbert begins in chapter one with a thirty-five-page exploration of the Space of Mind in which he deliberates on the mythopoetic nature of mind, how we perceive space and time, and the creative construction of imagined dimensions. Rather than thinking

through literal spaces, the imaginal spaces “inspire dwelling.” While literal spaces, our everyday world, have very direct implications within simplicity, we are encouraged to dwell in imagined spaces which can be much more complex and which can dynamically change in an instant. The reader should spend some time contemplating the Seven Properties of Thoughtspace outlined at the end of the chapter as these will be important later in chapter six when Gilbert embarks upon thirty-six qualities of Thoughtspace derived from these seven properties, illustrating each with several of the 216 haiku.

Chapters two through five cover volition, inhabitation and secrecy, privacy, and sanctuary. There is a discussion of anarchic sanctuaries which reads more like a set of interviews, which I found an odd way to explore this topic, and which seemed a little out of place, but that’s my opinion, your mileage may vary.

As previewed above, chapter six derives thirty-six qualities of Thoughtspace from the seven properties of Thoughtspace and illustrates each with several haiku. We don’t have the room to cover them all so I choose a few examples below.

One quality of the SPACE property is the quality of the new or novel worlds that we may explore. The fantastic or the nuanced differential world.

### **Novel Worlds**

*A philosophical-poetics utilizing new forms of language and thought spawns novel worlds of mind. These compositions reveal how imaginative modes that break with conventional thought – in language, image or story – not only surprise us, but may inspire revolutions in how a “world” is defined, or comes into existence.*

#### **MY LIFE BEHIND GLASS**

so lonely, the little verbs<sup>1</sup>

a blue coffin one nail escapes the solar system<sup>2</sup>

from somewhere else you’re a prairie skyline<sup>3</sup>

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1 Sabine Miller Haiku 16

2 Peter Yovu Haiku 14

3 John Martone, Disjunctive Dragonfly 2012

Another quality, derived from the third property THOUGHTSPACE is the quality that Gilbert terms “spatial thermoclines,” in which we pay attention to the shifts in resonance.

### **Spatial Thermoclines**

*Regarding Thoughtspace the qualitative emphasis here is on nuance of thought, feeling, and landscape – and a melding; a volitional metamorphosis of such notions. The sensibility of thermoclines pertains to spatial ambiance (a sense of ambient atmospheres): delicacy of feeling, a resonance which lifts away from gravity; buoyancies, a softening in receptive tone. Hesitancy, gentleness, sadness, longing – distance and intimacies – these are given sensual expression.*

Inside my laughter a stone looks at the sky.<sup>4</sup>

blossoming pear...  
a dream slips  
From its chrysalis<sup>5</sup>

moon beggar hesitant<sup>6</sup>

monologue  
of the deep sea fish  
misty stars<sup>7</sup>

autumn mist oak leaves left to rust<sup>8</sup>

Just enough rain  
To bring the smell of silk  
From umbrellas<sup>9</sup>

In *PaC* Gilbert lays out a typology of Properties and Qualities of Thoughtspace based on an extensive thesis that he has developed leaning on his philosophical and psychological perspectives.

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4 Rob Cook, Haiku 15

5 Rebecca Drouilhet, Haiku 15

6 Alegria Imperial, Haiku 14

7 Fay Aoyagi, Haiku in English 2002

8 Marlene Mountain, Haiku 21

9 Richard Wright, Haiku in English c.1960

While the reader may or may not agree with the entire typology, or even Gilbert's overall thesis, Poetry as Consciousness is a wonderful exploration of the creative mind. As with the typology described in TDD, each reader can decide for themselves if the haiku used to illustrate the quality fits that quality. Regardless, the reader that sticks with this book and contemplates the thesis put forward will find that they not only are enriched by the contemplation, but will also find that the typology begins to have an impact on their own haiku. This book is essential reading for practitioners and readers of haiku and, for that matter, any creative endeavor.

**Postscript:**

A word about the illustrations by Sabine Miller. The artworks provided are not only beautiful and illustrate the concepts, but show a keen awareness of the soul of haiku. Beautiful.