

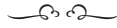


Briefly Reviewed

by Randy Brooks

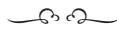
Sunflower Moon / Luna di un Girasole / Sonnenbloommond by Lucia Fontana (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 86 pages, 4.25" x 6". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

I believe *Sunflower Moon / Luna di un Girasole / Sonnenbloommond* is Lucia Fontana's first collection of haiku. Each haiku appears in her original Italian with translations into English and German. As she is a Buddhist psychotherapist, I am not surprised that in her postscript she states, "My feeling is that Haiku is Beauty, and it is a soul-gong. Awareness released in a short poem. Haiku shares life's wonder even of what seems invisible. I strongly believe in the evocative power of haiku and its healing nature" (no page numbers). The collection is arranged as a sequence, beginning with haiku about being a daughter: *rustling leaves / i can't recall my father's / last caress*. Then a young woman seeking romance: *giving in to love / the last dandelion / in autumn wind*. The title poem focuses on desire: *all that longing / to be together / sunflower moon*. Of course, love often comes with difficulties: *heart full of love / i cannot give / prickly pear*. There are some wonderful haiku of pregnancy: *little koi flips / singing to the womb / my baby kicks* and motherhood: *her little fist / inside my hand... / holding the sun*. The last portion of the sequence emphasizes independence and accepting oneself as in this haiku: *dandelion fluff / half blown away / my life* and the last haiku in the book: *mediTango... / with backward steps / i return to myself*. This is an excellent collection of haiku that share Lucia Fontana's life of awareness, healing, and imagination. She lets us hear and feel the resonating rings of her life's soul-gong.



From Here by Alice Frampton (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 64 pages, 4.25" x 6". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781947271463. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

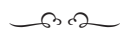
From Here is Alice Frampton's second collection of haiku. In the preface she writes that "Most times, life throws us curves, but sometimes, life throws us sinkers. And still, the game plays on." In conjunction with her dedication, "For Jon, who left us too early. And for Mom, who struggles to stay," this collection ranges from challenges to celebrations of the game of life. The book opens with a section called "Empty" with evocative haiku such as: *on the ferry / side by side seats / sitting empty* (no page numbers) and *brown bottle / I pour out the contents / of low tide*. The following haiku shares another type of emptiness: *the blouse / she used to fill / falling leaves*. Two of my favorites from this section are about missing a loved one: *candle smoke— / for all I know / he's not coming and it's been / eight years / raw onion*. The second section of the book features celebrations and lighter moments such as: *new resolutions ... / my granddaughter plans / a pretend tea party* and *new bathing suits / filling the boat / with laughter*. I think Basho would approve of this one: *Christmas sweater / plastered / with snowballs*.



Last Night of the Carnival by Marsh Muirhead (2019, Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA) 78 pages, 4.25" x 6". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. \$15 from redmoonpress.com.

Last Night of the Carnival starts in winter and progresses through the seasons with haiku of loss and a sardonic voice of aging. Two haiku convey moments of missing a companion: *wood tick / in the middle of my back / no wife* (no page numbers) and *canoeing without her / a wake / of autumn leaves*. In another he notices the irony of this situation: *Dear John letter / the forever*

stamp / a mixed signal. As the title suggests, these haiku have an atmosphere of life after the party has died down: *morning hangover / the washer shifts / to agitate*. He has three title poems and my favorite is from autumn: *last night of the carnival / an autumn chill / in the diesel fumes*. Several haiku continue to celebrate the outdoors life, but not with the fervor of his earlier work. In one Muirhead writes: *my life at eighty / I give up / on warblers*. In another favorite he observes: *so many flowers / at Mom's gravesite / sibling rivalry*. This is a well-written, honest collection of haiku and senryu.



Dewdrops by Roger Watson and Su Wai Hlaing (2019, Yould Publications, Hull, UK) 66 pages, 4" x 5.5". Black and white card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781645164425.

Roger Watson has been writing haiku and senryu for several years and introduced Su Wai Hlaing to the art in 2017. This is a collection gathering several of their poems, usually side by side on facing pages. Most of the poems in this book are senryu: *free newspaper / fake news / comes cheap* (rw, page 42). However, the title poem is a haiku: *May dew / mud / on my mother's hands* (rw, 14). Several of the senryu come in pairs, matched by content or tone. For example, Watson writes *keynote speaker / with no end / in sight* (rw 24) matched with Hlaing's *small talk / my patient forgets about / the needle* (swh 25). Here is another pair, linked by the word "changes": *at the junction / only my mood changes / broken lights* (rw 36) and *the rain stops / my sleep / continues* (swh 37). While the quality of the poems varies, it is fun to consider how each spread of pages matches. The final pair of poems is: *silent shredder / graveyard / of all my thoughts* (rw, 64) and *unpacking / the old house / in the new place* (swh, 65).



Alive & In Use: Poems in the Japanese Form of Haibun by Charlotte Mandel (2019, Kelsay Books, American Fork, UT)

58 pages, 6" x 9". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781949229868. \$14 from Amazon.com.

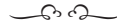
Alive & In Use collects 40 haibun written by Charlotte Mandel, a frequent contributor to contemporary haiku and haibun journals. As an experienced writer, editor and poetry teacher, Mandel excels at haibun. She understands the importance of intuitive interaction between the prose and poetry in this hybrid form. In the introduction she explains how “The haiku may amplify tone or meaning, or shift direction to a surprise experience. A haiku must evoke associations which are not ‘told’ but seem to be breathed into awareness. A haiku alone is brief, often lovely. A haibun offers language like a companion in thought—after prose images that present a three-dimensional world, the haiku takes the poem into a fourth dimension” (page 11).

September’s First Monday

Careful not to stumble on thick green sod, I stop and slowly bend to pluck a dandelion still yellow among dozens with globes of blow-away seeds. Holding the rubbery thread of stem between thumb and forefinger, I inhale scents of grass and earth cleansed by last night’s rain. Sun-warmed downy petals stroke my cheek.

*fontanel pulse
in the cup of my hand
once*

As you can see in this example on page 13, which won a “Favorite Haibun Award” from *Modern Haiku*, the prose is personal, conversational, but carefully crafted to establish an atmosphere, followed by an intuitive leap in the haiku which takes us to the vulnerability of a newborn baby. This is a collection that will reward the reader page after page.



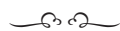
My Journal with Haiku Sprinkled In by David G. Lanoue (2019, HaikuGuy.com, New Orleans, LA) 236 pages 5.25" x 6". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-0991284092. \$9.99 from Amazon.com.

What a delightful book for those of us who love haiku. 200 years after the publication of Issa's *Oraga haru (My Spring)* journal, David Lanoue has published his own *My Journal with Haiku Sprinkled In*. In the fourth entry he explains that Issa filled his journal "with life events, philosophical musings, little random stories about this and that, and loads of haiku" (page 17) which is exactly what Lanoue has done in this book. For significant content, he explains in his first entry that "I watch no news, which means, no bad news. No massacred children in Africa ... no beheadings in Syria ...no missile strikes, anywhere, described as 'surgical.' I watch, instead, a fountain in a green park. I savor, instead the garble of water meeting water" (9). The journal is divided into four sections: My Spring, 2015; My Summer, 2016; My Autumn, 2017; and My Winter, 2018-2019. Lanoue is a professor of English at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. Therefore, most of his journal entries and haiku come from breaks from school—a sabbatical in Sofia, Bulgaria in Spring 2015, a summer vacation in Spain in 2016, an autumn visit to Japan in 2017, and a Christmas break in Omaha, Nebraska in 2018-2019. This book invites the reader to join in these breaks, sharing in his musings and enjoying the subsequent haiku or senryu that seem to spontaneously spring out of each day's events. His entry "Daylight Savings" describes an uneventful day at the university followed by several Halloween poems: *rainy Halloween / the pirate / takes it all* (146); *Halloween night / the Goth kids / are Goth kids* (147); and *still pretending / I'm me / Halloween* (147). And even though he doesn't dwell on the news, politics do appear briefly in this haiku about his return home to Nebraska: *visiting parents / who elected hate / merry Christmas* (177). There are so many good haiku and senryu "sprinkled" throughout his journal entries.

These are not haibun; they are just the journal and poems that come from a playful contemporary Buddhist's life of haiku.

At the very end of the book, Lanoue provides a “Lagniappe” which he explains “Down here in New Orleans, ‘lagniappe’ is a ‘something extra’—like a, for example, when you pay for twelve plump, juicy oysters and the friendly shucker shucks you thirteen” (222). This “lagniappe” turns out to be a short essay on “Renku, Haiku, and Buddhism” which I plan to share with my students in future haiku courses at Millikin University. In this essay Lanoue provides a concise overview of the historical development of renku, including its traditional inclusion of sexual love and the ultimate Buddhist emphasis on a celebration of all creation, represented by the shifting seasons. He also notes the importance of another Buddhist concept: “an aversion to retrogression. Repeating or lingering on the same images or categories of existence came to be understood not only as an aesthetic violation but as a spiritual failing” (224). He also discusses how “Shiki decided to make the hokku an independent form, replacing the communal and Buddhist spirit of renku with non-religious, Western-styled individualism” (228-229). One of the most fascinating observations in this essay is how “Every haiku/hokku is, by original design, a microcosm of renku; it consists of two poetic phrases separated by a hard grammatical break ... The reader is invited to contemplate and imagine how these two tiny verses of the micro-renky connect” (228). He concludes with an observation about some contemporary haiku poets “who passionately criticize the emphasis on Zen by some English translators of haiku, especially R. H. Blyth. These poets embrace Shiki's modern, secular, and individualistic concept of haiku as a literary genre: a sort of one-breath sonnet. Such so-called avant-garde haiku poets in Japan and around the world have made haiku the vehicle for showing off their cleverness through abstract language games inspired more by French symbolism than by Buddhist sutras. For these poets, a return to renku with its culture of sharing and

ego-suppression would perhaps be spiritually healthy” (230). Please don’t skip the “lagniappe” after enjoying Lanoue’s *Haiku Journal with Haiku Sprinkled In*.

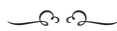


Going to the Pine: Four Essays on Bashō by Geoffrey Wilkinson (2019, Fransbridge, Powys, Wales) 60 pages 6.1” x 9.25”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 97819160622-0-7. \$9.99 from Amazon.com.

Going to the Pine is a collection of four essays about Matsuo Bashō’s approach to haiku, especially his call to “Go to the pine to learn about the pine. Go to the bamboo to learn about the bamboo. Set aside all personal thoughts and motives, for you will learn nothing if you insist on interpreting objects as you see them” (page 3). Rather than examine the range of Bashō’s poetry, Wilkinson closely examines key aesthetic goals and spiritual (Buddhist) perspectives that inform his work. In the fifty pages of the four essays, he writes about only five of Bashō’s haiku, with the majority of comments about just two of his most famous haiku: *The old pond— / a frog jumps in, / the sound of water.* (23) and *A cicada’s shrilling / pierces the rock— / unbroken silence* (39). Two of the essays are about the “old pond” haiku and one is an internal dialogue of Wilkinson’s process of translating the “cicada’s shrilling” haiku. In these essays, Wilkinson takes up the variety of interpretations by critics and considers our Judeo-Christian tradition difficulties making sense of the unintelligible or the fundamental nothingness in the world prior to our creation theories. In each of the four essays in this book, the focus is not so much the haiku but rather Bashō’s source or aesthetic inspiration for writing “the truth of things as they are, unencumbered by our own thoughts and preoccupations” (backcover). For example, in the essay on translating the cicada haiku, the difficulty begins from the phrase “the heart knows nothing but peace” in the prose that proceeds Bashō’s haiku. Wilkinson decides that the subsequent translation needs to capture this mountain temple

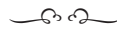
scene where “In its inner state, the heart exactly mirrors the ‘pure tranquility’ of the external surroundings” (34).

In his longest essay in *Going to the Pine*, Wilkinson compares the “strikingly similar” poetic sensibilities of Matsuo Bashō and John Keats as fellow poet-travelers. Wilkinson compares key comments from both and notices “that Bashō and Keats both stand for an unconditional openness to all experience, so unconditional that it demands a complete transparency—or, Keat’s word, annihilation—of the self” (14). Wilkinson explains further that for Bashō “the self probably had a religious-metaphysical meaning rooted in Buddhism; that is, the self represents our attachments, our preoccupations, our striving, everything that traps us in a divided ‘me/not-me’ relation to the world, and therefore it is an obstacle not just to ‘true’ poetry but to our own ‘true’ being as part of a greater reality beyond individual identity” (14). In this essay, Wilkinson goes on to consider how “going on the road” tested both poets’ openness to all experiences of humanity—prostitutes, impoverished people suffering fleas, and horses pissing nearby. Keats expresses his disgust along his travels, but Bashō accepts these situations and experiences with grace and understanding of shared suffering. Wilkinson concludes: “Bashō was steeped in a centuries-old, Buddhist-influenced literary tradition that returned again and again to the transitoriness of this world and the vanity of all our individual cares and ambitions. Unfair as the comparison is, perhaps we have to say that Bashō was the better traveler because, so to speak, he was better equipped to annihilate self” (22).



Turning the Page to Old by Robert Epstein (2019, Middle Island Press, West Union, WV) 156 pages, 5" by 8". Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. ISBN 97817333597951. \$15 from Amazon.com.

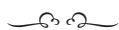
Having recently turned 65, Robert Epstein explores what it means (and feels like) to grow old in *Turning the Page to Old*. In the preface he states that “one of the great challenges of aging is preserving a spirit of enthusiasm in the face of bodily decline and multiple disappointments, frustrations, and, finally, death. I will say only that, for me, haiku has been a means of expressing my abiding faith through thick and thin” (page xvii). The first section, “Shrinking Inventory”, includes haiku such as: *extraction / this one won't be / a baby tooth* (14) and *leaves fall / so do my friends / the wooded path* (33). The second section, “Small Things”, highlights everyday observations and pleasures such as: *cherishing / the small things / toilet seat warmer* (45) and *foxtails— / they too go / mostly unnoticed* (56). The third section, “Out of Time”, conveys a sense of being behind: *Canada geese— / I know I am slowly / falling* (89) and *coldest night / my cup runneth / over the hill* (88). In the last section Epstein collects haiku of “What Remains” (after we’re gone). He writes: *no cane / no combover / just sunglasses* (115) and *empty rocker / I leave it / for you* (123). There are several music references throughout the collection, which closes with a Beatles’ song: *guess what / ob-la-di, ob-la-da / life goes on* (130).



Reckoning with Winter: A Haiku Hailstorm by Robert Epstein (2019, Middle Island Press, West Union, WV) 134 pages, 5" x 8". Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. ISBN 97817333597913. \$16 from Amazon.com.

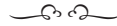
Although he grew up in New York and fondly recalls childhood memories of venturing out into the snow to play, in this collection Robert Epstein writes about enduring the cold, wet winter of the San Francisco bay area. In the preface he asks that his critics not ridicule him for being a “wuss” as he admits that “complaining or venting affords a modicum of relief; doing so enables me to endure. Haiku elevates the complaining just enough to see a little beyond my narrow, self-

pitying perspective” (page xx). Here are some of my favorites from this collection of haiku about resisting winter: *winter crows / they can't mean / what they say* (13) and *of course / right in the dead of winter / the roof leaks* (57). I also like the wet coldness in this one: *the long slog / foot in front of foot / to spring* (76), which reminds me of being a paperboy. One haiku even includes some musicality: *winter wind / her button holes / begin to hum* (98). Perhaps my favorite is this one: *coming apart / the way it came together / empty nest* (52). I don't think haiku has warmed Epstein up much, but does provide a distraction to help him get through the season to spring.



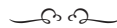
The Birds Sing Anyway: Selected Haiku, Senryu, and Small Poems by George Dorsty (2019, Buddha Baby Press, Windsor, CT) 100 pages, 4.75" x 7". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7327746-3-6. \$15.00, Available from George Dorsty. 1314 Showalter Rd. Yorktown VA 23692

George Dorsty is a retired English teacher and *The Birds Sing Anyway* is his second collection of poetry. He considers this to be his “legacy edition written especially with my children and grandchildren in mind, and the many students I've taught in Middle School, High School, and college over the past 48 years.” The opening haiku is also the title poem: *empty feeder— / the birds sing / anyway* (1). Several poems are about the persistence of joy and the celebration of life despite disappointments or challenges: *even uncared for / the rose puts forth / another bloom* (5). The haiku in this collection are simple and direct regarding the multitude of desires that lie just under the surface of everyday experiences. For example: *sidewalk crack— / forgiving / my mother* (4) and: *post-it note— / if only all my words / would stick* (10). Of course, he shares some humor as well: *used car lot— / old men / kicking tires* (18). One of my favorites is this playful one: *spring peepers / the whole town / knows* (39). And feel the freshness of: *morning dew— / the path made / by the paper boy* (51). This is a solid collection of well-lived haiku.



The Distance I've Come: My Haiku Journey by Adelaide B. Shaw (2019, Cyberwit, Allahabad, India) 66 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. ISBN 978-93-89074-55-0. \$15 from cyberwit.net or Amazon.com.

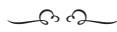
The Distance I've Come is Adelaide B. Shaw's second collection of haiku and is organized by ages of life. Here are samples through the ages starting with two from childhood: *circling moths / under a street lamp / the last game of jacks* (9) and: *shadows on a hill / an old sled at the bottom / upside down* (17). The second section features "marriage and family" as in: *these two haiku: beach cottage / grabbing damp suits and towels / from the porch rails* (23) and: *November rain / she calls home again / just to talk* (25). From the section on "harmonies" is: *between morning chores / I open the door— / lilacs in the rain* (34). The next section, called "new visions", features traveler's haiku like: *a Navajo weaver / sunset colors stretch across / desert sands* (53). In "the last part" are haiku of aging: *Indian summer / waiting on the sunny porch / for the doctor's call* (56) and loss: *one year later / along the cemetery creek / greening willows* (64). Adelaide B. Shaw is an outstanding haiku writer and I highly recommended this collection.



Sunflower Field: Haibun by Ludmila Balabanova (2019, Zhanet, Plovdiv, Bulgaria) 68 pages, 5.75" x 8.25". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-619-186-496-6

Sunflower Field is a dual-language edition featuring 21 Bulgarian haibun by Ludmila Balabanova with English translations. She provides this introduction: "Contemporary haibun is most often defined as a combination of prose and haiku poetry. Prose may be written in any style (from parable to fantasy, often tending towards prose poem), but must meet

the criteria of haiku aesthetics. This means, in general, ultimate brevity and simplicity, concrete imagery without abstraction and unnecessary figures of speech. Every word is very important, and verbiage is unacceptable. Intellectual reflections are avoided as well as directly shared ideas. Like haiku, haibun prose works with inspiration through images and short stories without comment, and usually contain a hidden global metaphor. The title is very important and often associated with the work's metaphor" (8). She practices what she preaches as in the opening haibun titled "Distances" which is a reflection on the "deep starry sky" and how "small and insignificant" we are, followed by the title poem: *sunflower field / the sun rooted / in the sky* (11). One of my favorite haibun is about a mother who works in a chocolate factory but "didn't have enough money for sweets and she wasn't allowed to take home samples for her family" (19). The subsequent haiku shifts to a haiku about abundance: *rocky mountain / even a single tree / is a forest* (19). To be honest, I often don't care for collections of haibun because I find the prose too predictable and the haiku repetitive from the prose. However, this is an excellent collection of evocative haibun. Balabanova sets a scene and a certain framework of contemplation in the prose, followed by a shifting, surprising, rewarding haiku. Her haibun achieve what the best haiku achieve—with multiple re-readings, they reward the reader with continued discoveries!



Noon: An Anthology of Short Poems edited by Philip Rowland (2019, Isobar Press, Tokyo, Japan and London, UK) 160 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-4-907359-26-3. \$20 from Amazon.com.

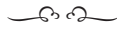
What a delightful collection of short poetry gathered and carefully arranged in this anthology, *Noon: An Anthology of Short Poems*, edited by Philip Rowland. These short poems previously appeared between 2004 and 2017 in his journal, *Noon: Journal of the Short Poem*. This collection takes me back to

my own earlier days as co-editor with my wife, Shirley Brooks, of *High/Coo: A Quarterly of Short Poetry* before we transitioned to *Mayfly* magazine, exclusively featuring haiku and senryu. Like *Noon* magazine, we published all kinds of short poetry simply because we loved each poem. It is with great pleasure that I have read *Noon* magazine over the years with its mix of short poetry, and now this gathering of poems in *Noon: An Anthology of Short Poems*.

In the introduction, Rowland answers the question “how short is ‘short’? The focus in *Noon* is on poems shorter than fourteen lines, with the exception of particularly ‘skinny’ or expansively spaced (but vertically spare) ones.” Avoiding sonnets and longer poems, he notes that “Many of the poems, however, fall well below this line-limit, with haiku and minimal poems (sometimes as short as one line, even one or two words) being featured for their particular openness and concision” (9). For example, here is a short poem by Daniel Zimmerman titled “Quantum Mechanics”: *nothing keeps happening. poetry still works* (146).

Rowland also notes in the introduction that “one of my reasons for starting the journal was that I wanted to read good haiku more often alongside and ‘in conversation with’ other varieties of innovative short poetry—to explore new kinds of poetic community, rather than to reinforce existing ones. One of the pleasures of editing the journal, and now the anthology, has therefore been to find a connection, sometimes surprising kinship, between quite different poems, often by poets who would not usually be found in the same publication” (9). Indeed, without fanfare, the short poems in this collection share certain similarities, like a careful selection of words and deliberate turning of phrases that break up and slow down consciousness into leaps of insight. This is evident in the beautiful vertically spaced poem by John Martone: *you / look up / from planting / bulbs / into / fall’s / new / spaces* (15). We find a similar vertical movement in this one by Lee Gurga: *we / linger*

/ at / breakfast / mother's burial dress / on / a / hanger / in / the / car (129). This collection celebrates writing and writers, as in John Levy's poem: (after Basho) / My poems aren't / really mine. Any more / than a frog / owns its croak / or its splash as it dives / beneath the green surface. / You see the surface translated / into language / ripples. (The frog invisible, / immersed.) (47). I find a connection to exploring language in Cherie Hunter Day's poem: moonlight the stitch in a metaphor (57). This is an excellent collection of clever, witty, evocative short poetry that plays with language and takes awareness seriously.



Triptych, haiku by Kala Ramesh, Don Baird, and Hansha Teki, (2019 Red Moon Press, Winchester VA) 180 pages, 4.25" x 6.5", perfect softbound, ISBN: 978-1-974241-42-5 \$20.00

reviewed by Richard Gilbert

How to write about the world, current events, interiority, the feeling of what's now—all sensitively, with freshness and surprise—and through the transformative magic of haiku, also inspire? *Triptych* is one answer, a novel approach by three authors increasingly in the international spotlight over the last several years. Kala Ramesh hails from India—poet, musician, dancer, educator—the spark which has lit the fuse of contemporary haikai forms in India; Don Baird—poet, martial arts premier grandmaster, musician, photographer, bonsai tender—has created several international haiku websites, such as *The Living Haiku Anthology* and *Under the Basho* journal; Hansha Teki hailing from New Zealand—poet, sacred world traveler, system admin of the above mentioned sites and more—has recently been pioneering “Parallels,” an extended haiku form. These three have been collaboratively forging online, international haiku communities. *Triptych* is a fruition of their creative minds weaving together significant edges of international concern, touching upon the recent Zeitgeist with rawness and grit. A sympathy of images shared: