

In “Nothing But Smoke,” the third section, she directs her unflinching eye to the human and natural losses that remain all too relevant to present day climate changes.

cry	atlas
of a screech owl	of a lost neighborhood
burn zone	sifting ash

This is docupoetry, an especially difficult achievement in haiku form. Renée does not fall into simply recording an event. She writes from within the event, using strong sensory images and feelings that are never heavy-handed.

The tone of reverence for all that is alive continues in the book’s last section, “Thin Line Of Hope.” Like all seasoned poets, Renée offers no answers. Hope is not put forth as a balm to remedy our losses. Renée respects the present moment. This is where she grounds her experience and vision.

this one life	whale spouts
I move the sparrow	this thin line of hope
to higher ground	migrating north

In a world that is overflowing with distraction, the understated voice can be the one that is most arresting and most needed. Renée Owen succeeds in making us stop and listen. *This One Life* is a beautiful haiku collection that belongs in everyone’s hands.



Briefly Reviewed by Randy Brooks

The Ohio Haiku Anthology edited by Joshua Gage (2020, Cuttlefish Books, Huron, OH) 164 pages, 4.5” x 6.25”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781735025704. \$10 plus \$3 postage from <https://pottygok.wixsite.com/cuttlefishbooks/books>.

The Ohio Haiku Anthology features haiku by 38 contemporary haiku poets who live or have lived in Ohio. After writing haiku for several years on his own, editor Joshua Cage was delighted to discover a growing haiku community in Ohio, led by Julie Warther, former Midwest Coordinator of the Haiku Society of America. With her encouragement, Joshua gathered this excellent collection “celebrating haiku in Ohio, both its past and present” (page 4). Here is a sampling of work from this anthology: *train’s whistle / the woods much deeper / than when I was young* by Francis W. Alexander (2). *flooded cornfield / ribbons of peach sunset / between each row* by Sharon Hammer Baker (21). *distant thunder / my daughter’s laughter / on the carousel* by Matthew Cariello (41). *summer heat— / the frayed embroidery / on her jeans* by Joshua Gage (58). *powdered sugar snow / mom’s cursive in the margin / of the recipe* by Jennifer Hambrick (67). *foster home / the bitter sweet taste / of lemon meringue* by Joe Mckeeon (105). *room to room / we take them with us / the last sunflowers* by Holli Rainwater (115) and one more: *pine needle path— / ordinary words / layered just so* by Julie Warther (141). Thanks to Joshua Gage’s anthology, it is clear that Ohio has blossomed with haiku writers!



Briefly in Spring: Haiku & Senryu by Judith E.P. Johnson (2020, Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide, SW, Australia) 64 pages, 5” x 7”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781760419196. Available from amazon.com.

Briefly in Spring is Judith Johnson’s twelfth book of poetry. This one features previously unpublished haiku and senryu. From her opening haiku: *swooping swallow / oh! the swooping swallow / out of sight* (7) to final haiku: *briefly / in spring we meet / forget me not* (62), we enter into Johnson’s quiet celebration of ephemeral joys—a sense of whimsical wonder within the space of each haiku. She expresses these discoveries with the lightness of a child’s perspective. *sparrow’s nest / child and I / share*

the secret (9). Even something dark as a prosthetic leg becomes a source of creative growth as in this haiku: *old soldier's cottage / geraniums grow / in a wooden leg* (15). Johnson is also very good at expressing quietude: *eventide / the murmur of doves / fills my thoughts* (30). She knows loss as well as love: *sunset lighthouse / the long shadow / of white crosses* (36). There are new generations facing new problems: *climate change / she nurses / a new grandchild* (55). This collection gives much to those willing to meet briefly in spring.



Park Bench Memories by Gary Hotham (2020, Yiqralo Press, Scaggsville, MD) 42 pages, 5" x 8". Four-color card covers, saddle stitch. ISBN 9798667125679. \$5 from amazon.com.

Park Bench Memories is Gary Hotham's latest collection of haiku that have been published in journals over the last ten years. In the epilogue Hotham cites a favorite quote from theologian John M. Frame: "All the wonderful things that we find in personality—intelligence, compassion, creativity, love, justice—are not ephemeral data, doomed to be snuffed out in cosmic calamity; rather, they are aspects of what is most permanent, most ultimate. They are what the universe is really all about" (32). They are also what Gary Hotham's haiku are all about—moments that show our intelligent, compassionate, creative, loving, justice-seeking humanity. Consider the title poem: *holding up the snowfall / the park bench / in her memory* (1). At first we think it is the park bench holding up the snow, but then we discover that it is her memory holding the park bench and the snow and of course much more. Several of the haiku in this collection are about loss and what is left behind. *hospice walls / a print of the famous / still life* (4). How do we recall the past and bring it into our present? *his death snuck by me / last night's storm measured / in the rain gauge* (7). Hotham always has an eye out for the layers of art beyond art as in this one: *The Louvre / one of the faces in the crowd / Mona Lisa* (15). We live

amongst things but embody them with our imaginations and memories: *after the funeral / her clothes hanging / by themselves* (29). In the epilogue Gary Hotham notes that he has been writing haiku since 1966 “making moments wear words.” This collection features some of the best dressed moments I have met!



Gratitude in the Time of COVID-19: The Haiku Hecameron edited by Scott Mason (2020, Girasole Press, Chappaqua, NY) 240 pages, 5” x 7”. Four-color printed hard-cover. ISBN 9781649706195. Available for \$24.95 (plus postage) at thewondercode.com.

Scott Mason states that “The inspiration and loose model for this book is another literary classic. In the mid-14th century, the Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio published *The Decameron*, a collection of stories told over ten days by ten young women and men who had decamped to a Tuscan country villa to escape the plague in Florence. [Boccaccio’s coinage ‘Decameron’ derives from ‘ten days.’] The book you are holding consists of work in haiku and related forms written by one hundred contemporary poets worldwide at the very height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s arranged in one hundred numbered day sections [hence ‘Hecameron’], each occupying a two-page spread—we literarily turn the page to a new day. But while *The Decameron* ostensibly served as a work of escapism, the work featured in this collection celebrates a return to the everyday wonders that surround us, even (and especially) in a strange and fraught time. These pieces are imbued with the haiku spirit of gratitude” (17-18).

For some, as in Lew Watts’ haibun, the quarantine is a time of remembrance. He and his wife are listening to *Abbey Road* “on repeat”. The haibun ends with a phone call to grandchildren and this haiku: *here comes the sun / I tell the little darlings / it’ll be all right*. In another haiku we see connections between generations: *quarantine haircut / a snowfall of mom’s hair*

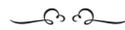
/ on the hardwood floor by Susan Antolin. Sometimes our only consolation is from pets: *time for a walk / I explain coronavirus / to my dogs* by Rose Clement. The collection includes several sequences including “Pandemic Day” by Penny Harter which ends with this one: *another dream— / I join strangers round a fire / and pray for them*. Perhaps the title of the collection comes from the haibun, “Words in Praise of Kentucky Soil” on page 22 by Jonathan Humphrey. Here is an excerpt: “Only now, with the virus spreading, do I think of my mother and her garden. The border to the north is closed. I will not see her for some time. She will be placing things in the earth, and digging things from it. Her back will be sore, and her hands heavy, as she parts leaves, stalks, her own hair. She will pause for the dragonfly that pauses for her. They will hover there together. And the world will be righted when they land.” Here is Jonathan’s closing haiku: *late blossoms / another chance / at gratitude*. Sometimes it is nature herself who teaches us gratitude: *shelter-in-place / the essential business / of sparrows* by Julie Warther. This is an outstanding collection of haiku from and with the pandemic. They are not haiku of paranoia or odd political partisanship. These haiku share in a humanity that is thankful for all the ways we find comfort and hope from the world and each other. I will end with this favorite from John Stevenson: *your book comforts me / its gentle weight / on my chest*. This is how we should read *Gratitude in the Time of COVID-19*.



Blossom Moon: Waukesha Haiku Group edited by Lee Gurga and Kelly Sauvage Angel (2020, Modern Haiku Press, Champaign, IL) 32 pages, 5.5” x 4.25”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9780960085521. \$10 from modernhaiku.org.

Blossom Moon is a first collection from a haiku group in Waukesha, Wisconsin. The group has been meeting monthly since 2015 at the First United Methodist where their host, Dan Schwerin, is the pastor. At these meetings they read

contemporary haiku and discuss issues of haiku poetics. At each meeting they also share one new haiku, seeking feedback and suggestions for improvement. This collection features some of the best work by ten participants: Dan Schwerin, David McKee, Dennis Schleicher, Jill Whalen, Jo Balistreri, Julie Warther, Kelly Sauvage Angel, Lee Gurga, Patricia Gregory, and Phil Allen. Each author introduces themselves with a short biography about their haiku journey, followed by a sampling of their haiku. The title poem comes from Dan Schwerin: *off her meds / and taking out a wall / blossom moon* (12). In his short bio, Dan writes that “I find the aesthetic of jinen or naturalness to be relaxing and a go-to place to reflect on the Sabbath day. These aesthetics have been life-giving for me.” Julie Warther writes that “I found haiku while writing my way through the grief of cancer and a series of deaths in my family. Today, writing haiku has become a way to help me make sense of the world, to distill a moment in time to its essence and record it into memory then share it with others.” Here is one of her contributions: *postpartum / a hole in the light / the shape of me* (38). I’ll share one more poet’s self-introduction. Kelly Sauvage Angel writes that “For me, haiku is a way of living. My practice is that which connects me to the natural world and provides a means of communicating with others.” Here is one of her more experimental haiku in two words: *bone brothel* (48). This collection invites us into the Waukesha Haiku Group briefly and lets us get to know a variety of writers at different stages of growth on their haiku journeys.



Along the Way: A Search for the Spirit of the World by Gilles Fabre (2020, Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, UK) 180 pages, 5.75” by 8”. Black and white card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-912773305. €12.00 from AlbaPublishing.com.

Along the Way: A Search for the Spirit of the World is a collection of haiku by a world traveler, exploring cultures and places.

For Fabre, the primary artifacts of exploration are the gifts of language. As he explains in the prologue, “The Intuit people had a custom, that comes from the depths of time and had almost been forgotten, to offer a handful of powerful words to another person in the form of an incantation. They believed that words, presented in this way, made magical powers enabling that person to see into things never seen or understood before. All haiku, fragments, notes and quotations in this book are presented in this spirit, as a gift for you” (5).

Invoking Bashō’s self-proclaimed identity as “wanderer,” Fabre takes on a journey around the world. The book is organized by places to be explored: Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, Oceania. Fabre starts his journey in Africa, with traveler notes about local sights, history and environment. Here is one of his haiku from the Ivory Coast: *midday— / in the shade of a baobab tree / a group of women* (21). From Cameroon he writes: *machine gun— / strapped to the soldier’s back / like mums carry babies here* (23). He makes a cross-country trip across the USA noticing *Amish mother / hitting the linen / with a baseball bat* (38) in Pennsylvania and the *Gateway Arch / reflecting the Mississippi / reflecting the morning clouds* (40) at St. Louis, Missouri. Evidently, he partied hardily in Las Vegas, because when he gets to Los Angeles he records: *catching my first sight / of the Pacific / with a massive hangover* (48). He heads north along the west coast to Seattle where he writes a homage haiku to Bashō: *cold evening / and no chowder left—call me traveller!* (51). After a short visit to Vancouver, he heads to Mexico and South America. Then his journey moves to Asia including Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, India and extensive travels in Japan. He makes a short stop in Dubai, where he writes *long hotel corridor— / male and female prayer rooms / at each end* (119). Then he writes about sites in Europe, including his home country of France. The book ends with travel to Oceania, New Zealand and Australia where he writes: *Christmas Day—/ some kids play cricket / with brand new gear* (162).

Gilles Fabre is a good travel writer so he is capable of carrying out this ambitious project to write haiku around the world.

His aesthetic goal is clearly stated: “Haiku, with its focus going from a local to a universal level, especially when it is taking up, or even unearthing, natural and human elements, literary and historical information, can provide us with a grounding, a fresh starting point, a new way to go towards the other and a different relation to our world, a new objectivity” (15-16). He has succeeded in writing objectively about the sites and locales around the world. It is difficult to say his haiku reach a level of universality of shared experience, but he does share his local observations along the way.



Home After a Long Absence: Haiku, Senryu and Tanka by Olivier Schopfer (2020, Ciberwit, Allahabad, India) 58 pages, 5.5” x 8.5”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 97893902022768. \$15 from amazon.com.

This fourth book by Olivier Schopfer celebrates everyday life and surroundings as inspiration for haiku. The book starts with a quote from Goethe: “He is happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds peace in his home.” The title comes from this haiku: *home after / a long absence / lilacs in bloom*. Sometimes a disruption in our routine helps us appreciate the familiar: *walking down a different street / to get home / my whole day changed*. Here is a quiet moment: *adding milk to my tea / the many shapes / of morning clouds*. Sometimes we feel a little trapped at home as in these two haiku: *confinement / my neighborhood / the whole world* and *ticking clock / the time / inside the snow globe*. Sometimes home also calls up regrets: *the words / I should have said / dying embers*. The collection ends with a moving day poem: *moving out / where the pictures used to hang / brighter spots*.



The Traces of Your Footsteps: Photo-haiku and Other Visual Poems by Dan Doman (2020, Editura Societăii Scriitorilor Romani, Bucurest, Romania) 194 pages, 5.5” x 8”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9786068412740.

In this collection by Dan Doman, each page features a photograph illustrating a related haiku in Romanian which is translated into English by Vasile Moldovan. This is Doman’s third photo-haiku collection which is arranged to suggest a seasonal progression. Here are a couple of samples from spring and summer: *a photograph of a crocus is accompanied by evening on the road / cold breeze scent / of melted snow* (16). A rusty barn door latch photo is paired with *latch pulled— / in the old stable / a patch of sky* (35).