

Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS KLACSANZKY

City Beach: Haiku & Senryu 1997 – 2023 by Dee Evetts (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 118 pages, 5.625" x 7.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-36-0. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

In a sense, *City Beach* is retrospective and a celebration of creative struggles and inspirations. In Evetts' introduction, the poet discusses his "renaissance" as well as his blockages in writing. He also delves into his personal aesthetics of double entendres, how location has affected his writing, and how his attitude has changed over "lightweight" poems. Also, Evetts' prose style is entertaining, informative, and natural with a purpose.

This style also extends into his haibun prose in the collection as well, which is a definite highlight of *City Beach*. But for the purposes of space, below I will give brief commentaries on the poems that I consider outstanding and illustrative of the poet's style.

from a distance
I watch the prisoner of war
dig our garden

Evetts judiciously uses "dig" as a double entendre, with the physical act of digging and also the liking of something, which connects to the Beatnik culture of the 1960s.

good cocks crow twice
still wondering
what she meant

With a more humorous touch, the poet plays on the myriad meanings of "cocks." I enjoy the mystery of "she."

retuning
the guitarist turns to face
the subway wall

The double entendre of “retuning” is more subtle than in the previous examples and offers a more spiritual interpretation.

Since Evetts noted in his introduction that he appreciates “lightweight” poetry more than before, here are three poems that highlight this aesthetic:

after the rain
in my vegetable patch
a new crop of stones

Though it may seem sad at first, there is some definite underlying humor in the phrasing and imagery.

his dust mask
a hole poked through it
for the cigarette

The irony and imagery work wonders for this poem.

breakfast for two
you declare your love
for a well-placed comma

The phrasing and pace of the lines showcase impeccable comedic timing. I also enjoy the mystery of “you” here.

More than anything, though, I feel the poems in *City Beach* are human and personable. They feature stories of people which illustrate their uniqueness and quirks. Reading this collection, I could not help but feel each poem came from reality and was detail-driven.

watching her scrape
first frost from the car
the tilt of our world

The poet moves from personable to cosmic, with various readings of “our.” I like how even though Evetts leaves the people in the haiku a mystery, we can often easily guess who they are.

lockdown I miss my dentist’s touch

What I find wonderful about this monoku is that this is something we may think and feel shy about sharing with others. Additionally, it makes us think about what touch can mean and if there is any impersonal touch at all.

deep gravel
my footsteps
sound purposeful

Though sometimes we feel a lack of depth as people in actions or speech, some parts of nature or human-made items can enhance our perspective of profundity. I see humor in this haiku but also a connection between humanity and nature. The most interesting point is that nature and our created material do not try to enhance us but happen spontaneously.

Besides witty, personable, and layered haiku, there are also several haibun in the collection. Like Evetts’ haiku, his haibun are detailed and bring to life the subjects and scenes depicted with flair. I could easily read a full-length non-fiction or fiction book by Evetts about the adventures he has taken. His prose is compelling, intriguing, and quirky in the best way.

Evetts also includes several photo haiku that are in full color and are vibrant. The connections between the haiku and the photographs are subtle and complement each other.

Ultimately, I highly recommend *City Beach* as a dive into the creative vision of Dee Evetts and his sharing of an obviously full life that engages in poetry, prose, and photography. ◻■

REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

Milkweed: Selected Haiku & Senryu of Alexis Rotella edited by Randy and Shirley Brooks (Brooks Books, Taylorville, IL: 2024). 156 pages, 6.5" x 9.5". Hardback, clothbound. ISBN: 978-1-929820-30-5. \$30 from www.brooksbooks.com

Alexis Rotella is a well-known figure in the English-language haiku community. This book celebrates some of her best haiku and senryu written over the past 46 years. The editors, Randy and Shirley Brooks, have done a fine job with their selections and with the layout of this book to give readers a real glimpse into Rotella's life and poetry.

In the preface, Rotella writes: "The name of this book, *Milkweed*, I believe captures the fact that even though I did not give birth to biological children, my creativity took flight from the mother plant seeding haiku wherever I am or wherever I go. My hope is that my offerings have inspired and will inspire others to devote their creative life to this tiny poetic form which brings joy and solace to people the world over."

The introduction by John Stevenson sets a reflective tone for Rotella as he acknowledges her dedication to writing haiku for over 40 years. Indeed, as Rotella enters the last years of this lifetime, she is leaving behind a legacy.

I will now write about my favorite haiku & senryu in this book, followed by brief commentary.

Floating through galaxies
of Queen Anne's lace
a white moth