

Book Reviews

REVIEWED BY KAT LEHMANN

A Lost Prophet by Jacob Salzer (Brooks Books, Taylorville, IL: 2024). 60 pages, perfectbound paperback. ISBN: 978-1-929820-34-4. \$15 from www.brooksbookshaiku.com.

A Lost Prophet is composed of 42 haiku, and 8 tanka, which are interspersed throughout the collection. Four of the haiku are one-liners (monoku) and the remainder are tercets.

The book begins with "Pre-Conquest," a short chapter of four haiku that sets the tone before moving into the main section of the book. Two quotes from Matsuo Bashō ask us to "follow Nature and return to Nature" and remind us that "every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home." Salzer's poems in this section expand on these ideas. An elder's story begins. We enter darkness and sail a turbulent sea. There is a foreshadowing, perhaps, for a journey to come, and the journey itself will be our home.

The overall structure of the book is reminiscent of Salzer's previous book *Unplugged*, which likewise begins with a dedication to Mother Earth, family, and our ancestors. This is followed by the same two Bashō quotes and a four-haiku introduction. The theme of *Unplugged* is setting aside the digital in order to cultivate spiritual oneness and encounters with the natural world. The current collection, *A Lost Prophet*, moves deeper into that space of presence and awareness to connect with our various lineages. What wisdom can be inherited when we open ourselves to it? We find this expressed in the title poem of *A Lost Prophet*:

river mist . . .
the faint whispers
of a lost prophet

Is it a coincidence that the last poem of *Unplugged* seems to speak to the title poem of *A Lost Prophet*? Perhaps the "old man" is clearing his throat to be our guide in the current volume.

sea shell —
the old man curls
into a fetus
(*Unplugged*— Haiku & Tanka, Lulu, 2022)

sapphire ice
begins to thaw
the elder's story
(*A Lost Prophet: Haiku & Tanka*)

In the main section of *A Lost Prophet*, we are immersed in an ethereal dream-state of images, many of which repeat throughout the book. Twisted roots and branches. Melting ice. The dreams of animals and humans. What is beyond or within a cemetery or a church. The shape and depth of rivers. Discovered bones. Moss. Elder. Mother. Father. And the return of voices in the wind that speak through both silence and whispers.

Throughout the book, there is a feeling of reverence for untold stories. Stories of generations past. The overlooked stories of nature. The stories we keep to ourselves. The stories yet to be.

washed ashore
the bones of yesterday
the future of me

The tone of the book is meditative. The interweaving of moments and voices bring an immediacy to the threads of what is seen and unseen as the poems edge between this world and the next. The feeling is not of journeying but rather hovering in this in-between state.

moonlight
in the ocean's tide
this pull
to live on Earth
this pull to leave

We receive the suggestions of stories within this white space that asks us to linger. In the below poem, we can consider the identity of both the subject and the observer and how a poem shifts along with our reading of it. How, for example, does the meaning change when we imagine different relationships between the "he" and the observer, or with different ages of the observer?

his empty whiskey bottle breaking the silence

The poems are sensitive to life's mysteries, ranging from wonder to loss to rediscovery. We do not dwell in melancholy but set it aside to explore ancient and family mythologies. What lost prophets can we hear when we are ready to listen?

mother's voice
beyond the church wall
a trail of moss

The book is an experience of this questioning state rather than a collection of answers. It honors the home of what came before and where this leaves the protagonist who is seeking their place in the continuum of things. The process of seeking is valued over any specific destination.

autumn rain
the paint on the canvas
still drying

darkness shapes the timeless river returning stones

The penultimate poem of the book, a tanka, brings a certain closure. We find acceptance and make room for what comes next:

holding you
for a long moment
by the forest creek
the water reminds me
to let go

Those who enjoyed *Unplugged* will enjoy *A Lost Prophet* with its spiritual longing that is framed somewhere between the afterworld and an ageless inner world.

campfire embers . . .
my mother's voice
drifting to sleep

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS KLACSANZKY

Sōseki Natsume's Collected Haiku: 1,000 Verses from Japan's Most Popular Writer edited by Erik Lofgren (Tuttle Publishing, Rutland, VT: 2025). 312 pages, hardcover. ISBN: 978-4-8053-1845-4. \$19.99 from tuttlepublishing.com and online booksellers.

Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) is primarily known as one of Japan's greatest modern novelists, though with Sōseki having been an avid student of Masaoki Shiki, he helped legitimize haiku as a modern literary form during the Meiji period. While most Western readers are familiar with Sōseki as the author of *I Am a Cat*, *Botchan*, and *Kokoro*, this collection delves into his origins as a poet and expands his literary legacy into the realm of haiku. It's a compelling reminder of his versatile craft and offers insight into his range. Looking at the price, \$19.99 on the Tuttle Publishing website, reading 1,000 haiku from a legendary writer whose haiku is relatively unknown in the West is a steal. Here are some haiku