

context. Her haiga are interspersed throughout the haiku, and while it's disappointing (but understandable) that logistical considerations required them to be black and white, I appreciated the opportunity to have them included.

Following the haiku, we are treated to a small assortment of Chiyo-ni's haibun, and then her linked verse. The linked section also has its own short essay, which expands on the social function of poetry in 18th-century Japan. The poems consist of a selection of tanrenga, as well as renga of various lengths. This section also includes an assortment of "greeting" haiku which, although not linked verse in and of themselves, further illustrate the Donegan and Ishibashi's focus on the social nature of haiku.

The Poetry of Chiyo-ni is a well-structured volume that will appeal to a range of audiences. It is a comprehensive overview of the range of Chiyo-ni's work, and also provides aesthetic and cultural insight that is often overlooked in the haiku education of English-language practitioners. The strong theoretical focus will appeal to academics and more advanced poets, but the writing is accessible and engaging, so those without a background in theory or history will enjoy it as well. Donegan and Ishibashi have created a book that not only celebrates the life and work of a great haiku master, but also given English-language practitioners the ability to strengthen our understanding of the form and, by extension, our own haiku practice.

Bird Haiku: Poems and Illustrations of North American Birds by Spencer Thompson (Sioux Falls, SD, Oxbow Commitee: 2025). 126 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 979-8-218-62541-2. \$24.00 from online booksellers.

In Spencer Thompson's debut collection *Bird Haiku*, he pairs 57 poems along with a corresponding public domain image. In his introduction, Thompson notes that, "These haiku capture meaningful moments within my life that involved a bird in one

way or another,” and also explains that the structure takes us from residential areas to increasingly wild spaces. In terms of the overall form of the book, Thompson has done an excellent job of transporting us on the promised journey. However, while I don’t doubt that all of the haiku depict profound moments for him as an individual, I found that the haiku didn’t always resonate with someone who hadn’t shared that exact moment. For example, most of the haiku tend to be purely descriptive, such as:

Ibises flying
over the massive reservoir—
scythe-like bills

There is no sense of juxtaposition, no ambiguity, no sense of *why* this particular moment resonated with Thompson so much. Whatever spoke to him is not clear. In addition, although Thompson writes about the value of “removing overly fluffy and poetic terms” in his discussion about haiku as a form, I found many of his poems bogged down by unnecessary details. For example:

The park’s parking lot,
full of old fast food litter—
gulls picking through the trash

In this haiku, I don’t believe it matters that the parking lot is in a park, especially because “park” immediately following “parking lot” is clumsy to read. I fail to see the point of the comma, and I also don’t see the adjective “old” as necessary. We also don’t need the -ing in the word “picking.” Thompson is correct that we generally eschew unnecessary words in our own poems, but he needs to be more careful in his application of that principle.

I still found several haiku in this book to enjoy. For example,

Riparian zone—
a barred owl sings
further back

This poem presents a compelling landscape, and evokes the haunting song of a barred owl. As a reader, I can enter into the poem and understand why this moment was so profound.

Although I have been tough on the poems in this book, I applaud Thompson for having such a clear vision for his debut collection. I think this book would resonate with the ornithologists in your life, both professional and amateur, so consider it for your next gift-giving occasion for a bird-loving friend.

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY ALLYSON WHIPPLE

Random Blue Sparks by Debbie Strange (Snapshot Press, Ormskirk, Great Britain: 2024). 96 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-903543-59-7. £12.99 from snapshotpress.co.uk.

Debbie Strange's new haiku collection evokes the full seasonal range of the Canadian heartland. Taking us on a poetic journey that begins in spring and ends in winter, the poems in this collection are expertly arranged thanks to the editorial eye of John Barlow. I appreciate the subtle thematic resonance that undercuts *Random Blue Sparks*. In addition to birds, rocks, soil, and snow, we find a slow current of grief meandering through the book, such as in the poems:

weaving light
into this day of mourning . . .
damsel flies

and

kittiwakes
mom's last smile hangs
in the air.