

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.

Much of the book's success stems from the fact that the reader encounters repeated themes and images, but they don't feel forced or ponderous. You might, for example, be so wrapped up in the seasonal journey that you don't notice the collection begins and ends with clouds. I recommend this collection as a powerful study in creating haiku that focus on the external world, yet leave space for the human emotions that undercut our perceptions.

Creek Crossing by Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff (Brooks Books, Taylorville, Illinois: 2025). 48 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1929820-3-68. \$15 from brooksbks.com.

Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff's *Creek Crossing* is a chapbook focused on the power of water. She opens the book on one of those snowy spring days characteristic of Iowa (and much of the rest of the American midwest), and closes on winter., bringing us back to snow, but this time the kind that results in childhood merriment. In between we encounter rivers, mist, fog, rain, and even tea. Although most of these water images appear more than once, skillful arrangement of the poems means that each one feels fresh. Through the repetition of common images, Valorie is able to give the reader surprising and compelling moments, such as:

unseasonable warmth
the lake's surface
keeps the clouds

and

funeral morning
the pattern rain leaves
where he stood

Creek Crossing is a well-structured read that, though its short, encourages you to read it slowly. It is an excellent tribute to the

power of water in human lives, as well as a beautiful depiction of midwestern seasons.

A Call's Loon by Vandana Parashar (Brooks Books, Taylorville, IL: 2025). 60 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-19298-20382. \$15 from brooksbks.com.

The compellingly titled *A Call's Loon*, Vandana Parashar's third chapbook, is a celebration of her life in the period "after haiku." She writes in her introduction that after learning to write haiku, "The mundane things started to seem extraordinary—such was the power of the shortest form of poetry." She has done an excellent job selecting and organizing an arrangement of haiku that encapsulate the "dailiness" of a woman's life, including childbearing/rearing, caring for aging parents, and the challenges of domestic life. I'm particularly fond of the monoku:

despite everything I did dead begonias

in light of my own gardening failures that seem inevitable every year. In addition to these small daily moments, Vandana also manages to make room for broader topics such as social issues and religion:

uninstalled the versions of God I didn't like

I admire the way that Vandana is able to take these often controversial and abstract topics and turns them into tangible and compelling moments. In *A Call's Loon* Vandana shows herself to be adept at the concept of shisei, and I recommend this book to anyone interested in studying compelling examples of the sketch from life.

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JOSHUA GAGE

Juan de Fuca's Rascal Road Signs Along the Narrow Road to the Interior by James Bledsoe (Published by Author: 2025). 210 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1966442-77-6. \$19 from online booksellers.

Juan de Fuca's Rascal Road Signs Along the Narrow Road to the Interior by James Bledsoe is meant to be a parody of Basho's *Narrow Road to the Interior*. Bledsoe's premise is that, rather than be inspired by Chinese poetry or the pilgrimage itself, Basho was inspired by a series of road signs that were placed there by the frog or frogs of his famous frog pond haiku. This book is a mess; the language is that of a drunken hipster who wants to be cool and clever but regularly dips into racism and cultural misrepresentation for its punchlines. Beyond that, the bulk of the "illustrations" seem stolen directly from Alamy, Shutterstock, and similar sites, which leads readers to believe this book is also theft. According to the letter that came with the book, ours is one of sixty copies; that is probably fifty-nine copies too many, and only the most determined and thorough of collectors would want to own this book.

Trying on the Night Sky by Mary McCormack (Published by Author: 2025). 162 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-0998172-06-4. \$19.99 from online booksellers.

A 147-page collection of haiku, with no more than one or two haiku per page, *Trying on the Night Sky* by Mary McCormack is gathering of McCormack's most recent work. The poems range from traditional three lines — if a dream/could be a dress.../trying on the night sky or water lilies.../how I bloom/in your hand — to one line pieces — watercolor painting the forest full of light. A very thorough collection from a known practitioner of haiku that would find its place on the shelf of any haiku enthusiast.

syphons by Rebecca Lilly (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2025). 186 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-61-2. \$20.00 from Red Moon Press.

Rebecca Lilly is a known academic, author, and poet. She has three books of haiku published, with *syphons* being her newest. Lilly's haiku are deliberately opaque, and she approaches haiku writing as co-creation with her readers. As such, the poems are very post-modern in their presentation and craft:

beyond rocks the body
retreats to the drop-
off visible in grief

or

crows feathering pine resin
scent the ensouled invention
in wooded leaves of moleskin

While they may not be immediately accessible as one would expect from haiku, these haiku are deliberately crafted to engage the reader and make them work. Lilly's work shows readers one direction that contemporary haiku can take, one which is unique to her artistic skills and voice. Though grossly overpriced, as per Red Moon Press's usual, this 184-page collection will reward readers willing to take their time with these poems.

timbre by Hilary Tann (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2025. 128 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-59-9. \$20 from Red Moon Press.

Hilary Tann was a Welsh musician and composer who established herself in the United States. She was a founding member of Route 9 Haiku Group and was frequently published in various haiku journals. *timbre* is a collection of her selected haiku, all of which

are brilliant and expertly curated by the Red Moon Press team: *hospice visit / glimpses of her / in her other friends* and *calling / from balcony to balcony / caged birds*. The introduction states that there are over 1,000 poems of Tann's published and in the 109 pages of poets in this collection, which means readers will be lucky to have more such collections in the future. At the \$20 cover price, one would hope for more poems, but this is a solid collection of haiku that any reader will want on their shelves to read and study.