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Anatoly Kudryavitsky (ed.). *Bamboo Dreams: An Anthology of Haiku Poetry from Ireland.* Tralee, Co. Kerry, Ireland: Doghouse Books, 2012, 91 pp., perfect softbound, 5 x 7.5. ISBN 978-0-9572073-2-5, €12, available postage-free, inquire at <www.doghousebooks.ie>.

by Roberta Beary, Bethesda, Maryland

My father Patrick would never come to the phone when his cousin Tess O'Neill called him, claiming he was too busy to talk. Tess and my father were first cousins, each the only child of two sisters who emigrated from Co. Cavan, Ireland in 1907. It was left to my mother, whose parents were born in Sicily, to speak with Tess and find out the latest family news of the O'Neills, which she in turn would relay to my father. My mother loved all things Irish because she loved my father.

I thought of my mother during my most recent visit to Ireland in October 2012, when I was welcomed in Dublin by members of Haiku Ireland, who presented me with a signed copy of *Bamboo Dreams: An Anthology of Haiku Poetry from Ireland*, edited by Anatoly Kudryavitsky. I was not familiar with the book, but I immediately understood that the first "Anthology of Haiku Poetry from Ireland" need not be edited by someone with an Irish name.

Editor and artist (his artwork, titled "Bamboo Dream," graces the book's cover), Kudryavitsky is also a founder and, according to his short bio at the back of the anthology, the chair of the haiku group IHS. I suspect that I am not the only parochial-school-educated reader who immediately thinks of the abbreviation for *Iesus Hominum Salvator* (Jesus, savior of [all] men), when seeing "IHS" mentioned in this anthology. However, because my own work has appeared in the IHS

journal *Shamrock*, I know that IHS stands for Irish Haiku Society, and Kudryavitsky is the editor of *Shamrock*. Since the short bio did not tell me what connected him to Ireland, I turned to that virtually bottomless well of information, *Wikipedia*.

It did not disappoint. Kudryavitsky's entry states in part that his "mother Nelly Kitterick, a music teacher, was the daughter of an Irishman from County Mayo who ended up in one of Joseph Stalin's concentration camps. . . . Having lived in Russia and Germany, Kudryavitsky now lives in South Dublin. . . . After moving to Ireland in 2002, Kudryavitsky has written poetry, especially haiku, predominantly in English, but continues to write fiction in Russian. . . . Kudryavitsky started writing haiku in Ireland. In 2006, he founded the Irish Haiku Society with Siofra O'Donovan and Martin Vaughan."¹ It appears that in addition to being haiku poets, Kudryavitsky and I share the bond of an Irish grandparent.

Ireland has long been a hospitable country for writers, including writers from abroad. So there is nothing unusual in finding Russian-born writer and haiku poet Kudryavitsky deciding to make his home there. But what led him to edit an anthology of haiku poetry from Ireland? I did not find the answer in his introduction to *Bamboo Dreams*, titled "Haiku in Ireland," but I came away with an understanding of the history of haiku there as seen through his eyes. I learned of two Irish haiku organizations, Haiku Ireland and the Irish Haiku Society, when they were founded, and how many members each organization boasts. (Full disclosure: I am an overseas member of Haiku Ireland.)

In the introduction I also learned that around 1965–1967 the well-known Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote a single haiku, "evidently not even suspecting that was a haiku—and a worthy one!" Kavanagh's haiku appears in the anthology on page 32:

corn-crake
a cry in the wilderness
of meadow

A poem by Seamus Heaney, arguably the most famous haiku by a Nobel Prize winner, appears on the same page.

dangerous pavements . . .
but this year I face the ice
with my father's stick

The introduction also informs the reader that both these haiku appeared in a different version when first published. In Kavanagh's haiku, the first line is actually the title of the poem. Perhaps that is why Kavanagh did not realize he had written a haiku since haiku are not known for having titles. Similarly, the Seamus Heaney haiku is also titled in its original version, which appears this way in Heaney's collection, *Seeing Things*.²

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Dangerous pavements.
But I face the ice this year
With my father's stick.

How this version of Heaney's haiku changed into the version included in *Bamboo Dreams* is a question for another day.

A more important question is which poets were included in the anthology. Kudryavitsky tells us in his introduction that "this book offers not a compilation of poems 'about' Ireland but rather the most evocative haiku written by poets born or residing here. We don't claim that we included haiku by every poet who practices the genre in this country, let alone visitors and short-term residents. However, our aim was to make this anthology inclusive. We found room for a few haiku by Irish mainstream poets, as long as their texts were convincing."

Whether or not these are the most evocative haiku written by poets born or residing in Ireland must rest with the reader. Reading *Bamboo Dreams* introduced me to the impressive poetry of Juanita Casey, whom the editor praises in his introduction as "the first Irish poet to write haiku as we know

them.” I was quite taken with all four haiku by Casey that *Bamboo Dreams* offers the reader:

burning leaves . . .
the face once again
feels summer

the pickers
have left one plum—
hey wind

why rage if the roof
has holes?
heaven is roof enough

under the bridge
the stream—
the leaf and I,
travellers

This last haiku meets my standard of “evocative haiku,” a poem that resonates strongly with the reader, especially since the anthology’s introduction and biographical notes describe Casey as “a travelling woman born in England of Irish parents.” For those readers not familiar with the term “traveller” as used here, its meaning encompasses “a traditionally itinerate people living especially in . . . Ireland.”³ *Bamboo Dreams* also contains haiku in the original Irish with English translations, including works by Gabriel Rosenstock and Séan Mac Mathúna. In reading and re-reading their work and that of others, I found these poems to be especially noteworthy:

empty house
soft brown apples
under the tree

late August stillness
long I gaze at the pear tree
one hand on the gate

Patrick Gerard Burke

Jessie Lendennie

her bony back
against my palm—
Mother’s Day

Maeve O’Sullivan

in the bowl
that survived last night's earthquake
I place my wedding ring

Gilles Fabre

troubled sleep
the half of the moon
I couldn't see

John W. Sexton

While there are exceptional haiku in *Bamboo Dreams*, the inclusion of many haiku by a single author too often sacrifices quality for quantity. This is not the first haiku anthology to suffer from this malady. Kudryavitsky includes 12 of his own haiku in *Bamboo Dreams*. He bestows this same honor on 15 of the 77 poets included here with one or two additional poets coming in at 10 or 11 haiku. Good editors must be ruthless in separating the wheat from the chaff. For example, while I found these three haiku of Leo Laverty's very fine:

I shut the history book
and the shooting
stops

blackbird
still peddling
its old sweet song

sewing cobwebs
in its corner—
the old Singer

Haiku such as:

on the piano
dusted yesterday
dust

left me wondering why they were included.

The anthology truly would represent the highest quality of haiku poetry from Ireland by limiting the number of a single poet's haiku to those that are outstanding. In most cases three or four.

An anthology of haiku poetry from Ireland is long overdue. Kudryavitsky deserves credit for helping define the landscape of haiku in his adopted country with the release of this pioneering work. The haiku of Juanita Casey alone are worth the price of admission.

Notes

1. "Anatoly Kudryavitsky." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, December 3, 2012. Retrieved January 11, 2013 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatoly_Kudryavitsky.
2. Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1991, 22. (First published in 1991, Faber & Faber.)
3. Retrieved January 11, 2013 from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/traveller/> citing *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin, 2000, 2009.



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