

Paul Pflueger, Jr. *A Zodiac*. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2013, unpag., perfect softbound, 4.25 x 6.5. ISBN 978-1-936848-18-8, US\$12 from www.redmoonpress.com.

by Francine Banwarth, Dubuque, Iowa

how I know them the ones that never leave harbor

in the incandescence let me let me read me to you

stars the few drunk synonyms

she and I in the mirror of the tantrum

What better way to introduce a poet's first collection of haiku than to let the voice in the poems speak for itself? Each of the above haiku is taken, respectively, from one of the four sections in *A Zodiac*: "haunt," "plot," "ground," and "nest." The sectional titles can be read as either noun or verb, as place or action, and each suggests a complexity of nuances, a quality that enriches the art of writing both traditional and experimental haiku. Jack Galmitz writes in the preface that Pflueger has a "propensity towards multiple meanings of words and poems. His is an open-ended poetry. He wants the reader to enter as a co-creator, actively engaging his/her own associations with the poems. This is the joy of the poem as performance, not objectified meaning."

Many of us are familiar with Pflueger's work and know him as co-editor, with Scott Metz, of *R'r (Roadrunner)*, the online haiku journal, which publishes authors who are experimenting with innovative haiku and senryu. These are two strengths of Pflueger's own work: experimentation and innovation. Better still, he is a word master, a professor of English in Chiayi, Taiwan, where he lives with his wife and daughter. Born and raised in Buffalo, New York, Pflueger is grounded in his past, which we can identify in this collection, yet he brings to it a personal and world view honed in the etymology of language.

Again, from the preface, Galmitz muses, “Why *a Zodiac?* Pfleuger is not particularly interested in the sky or in imaginary intersections in the orbiting planets. We find his intentions etymologically: the word ‘zodiac’ derives from the Greek *zōion*, a living being, akin to *zōē*, life. That is what his book is: corporality in words, life in words, beings in words.”

a zodiac a slow train held up to answer

What writers have to say, and how they say it, has entertained and engaged the human mind, and heart, through the ages. When it comes to the craft of haiku, Galmitz identifies Pfleuger as a “skilled technician in the genre.” Pfleuger doesn’t simply deliver images; he layers them, repeats rhythmic patterns, condenses thought and word, “abridges” or fragments the expected flow, reduces the poem to its necessary elements, and deftly steps off where the reader steps on:

commuting
abridged
river

Nine of the poems in this collection are published in *The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A New Approach to English-Language Haiku*. (See “Briefly Reviewed” in this issue.) In 2011, a generous selection of Pfleuger’s work was featured in *Haiku 21: An Anthology of Contemporary English-Language Haiku*. (See “Briefly Reviewed” in *Frogpond* 35:2.) Pfleuger’s voice shines among those illuminating the cosmos of “the new haiku.”

bed light evolved into fiction honeyed whisper

a loud perfect
darkness
around
a neon cross

the exit the wandering part squid boat lights

Reading a few poems, I felt I was wandering in the darkness, trying to feel my way into and around the poet's intent and meaning, as, for example, in

bling holla milking the hourglass object

To be honest, I was completely lost. But having spent hours with the collection, and trusting the poet's reputation, I felt there was a key to unlock meaning here. The terms "bling," "milking," "hourglass," and "object" were all familiar to me. I wasn't sure, though, about "holla" and was mystified as to how the parts fit together, that is, were put together to make sense. The "key" was an urban dictionary (googled online), which gave a few definitions of *holla*, and one in particular: "For a man to express interest in a particularly impressive female species." Suddenly, the juxtaposition, the layering of images, the internal *kireji*, the wordplay, the poet's suggested intent were clear, and delivered, for me, a poem I could enter and appreciate on more than one delightful level.

The last ten poems in *A Zodiac* introduce the reader to a new chapter in the poet's life—the birth of his first child—and it is here, Galmitz suggests, ". . . that the book fulfills itself":

coming to light
in the room full of books
our sonogram

the universe
the metropolis
muted by a nipple

her da da da
white lotus leaves
drip diamonds

Throughout this collection, my interest and intrigue did not wane. "In the incandescence" I felt that I was guided, not led, into and around the inner and outer spaces, the tapestry and texture of this poet's writing life, and that mine is richer for it.

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