

A Thousand Sparks by Diarmuid Fitzgerald (2018, Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, UK), 76 pages, 5¾ x 8¼”, perfect bound. ISBN: 978-1-910185-44-5. \$14 from info@albapublishing.com

Reviewed by Catherine Anne Nowaski

Diarmuid Fitzgerald is a poet of place. In the Author’s Preface to his second book, *A Thousand Sparks*, Fitzgerald says that he practices “going to a place to see if it will inspire.” The haiku and senryu in the first three parts of his collection trace Fitzgerald’s odyssey from his homeland in Ireland to Japan and back again.

Fitzgerald’s poems do not tend to jump out at the reader with particularly striking images or unexpected word choices. Instead, they have a quiet simplicity very much in keeping with the Zen philosophy he studied while living in Japan.

Each of the first three sections of the book begins with an image of light and contains three, two, or one line poems. Unusual for an individual collection, all poems are printed two to a page. This allows for an interesting interplay between the haiku. Consider for example the opening page in part one, Ireland:

reflecting —
the sun shattered into
a thousand sparks

grandad’s lantern —
snowflakes fall
into the light

From the magnificence of sunburst to the intimate glow of lantern light in the darkness, the contrast and resonance deepen both poems.

The following deceptively simple haiku, which was runner up for the BHS Museum of Literature Award in February 2017, consists of just ten mostly monosyllabic words, a skillfully placed comma, and a dash. Excluding articles and prepositions, there are only four unique words in this haiku. And, yet, somehow the repetition is musical, pleasing the ear as well as the mind’s eye:

trees, more trees —
the bend of the road
bending on

In part two of the book, the poet opens himself to new experiences (“temple gate I open my palm to the rain”). The culture and landscape of Japan are depicted in whispering susuki (pampas grass), abandoned huts, street people and the like. A particular lovely juxtaposition:

twig mushroom —
the old flute’s
silent buttons

If the poems in Ireland seem somewhat solitary, many of the images in Japan are communal. Here in Japan the poet finds love, whether that of others:

wind stirred night —
the moaning from
a young couple next door

or his own:

my Japanese boyfriend
we hold hands
until the train comes

In part three, Ireland Again, the poet is home once more with perhaps a keener perception of the beauty and humor in his everyday surroundings. There are more haiku with the lyricism that one associates with traditional Irish poetry:

summer stillness ash leaves deepen the green

Fitzgerald has found a way to express a Zen spirit with an Irish lilt.

The fourth and final part of the book is a sequence written while traveling by rapid transit around Dublin Bay. Two favorites from this section are the lighthearted:

rushing crowds the green balloon’s bouncing boy

and the collection’s concluding poem:

estuary sunset
the orange glow
of traffic cones

In short, *A Thousand Sparks* is the type of book that may go unnoticed initially, but a closer reading rewards. Expect more to come from this fine poet.

moon on water by Brendon Kent (2018, Alba Publishing, Uxbridge, UK) 76 pages, 5¾ by 8¼, Perfectbound ISBN 978-1-910185-43-8, £12 / €14 or order from info@albapublishing.com

Reviewed by Jay Friedenberg

moon on water is a collection of 57 poems, all previously published by Brendon Kent. The book includes a mix of haiku, senryu, and tanka. Kent hails from Southampton in the UK where he has been a long time student and writer of poetry in all its forms. The poems in this work are divided into six chapters capturing different moments and experiences across a long stretch of Kent's life. Jan Benson helped in the selection and organization of this work. Alan Summers also served in an advisory capacity.

the wind where the empty swing swung

This one liner has a great sense of alliteration and empty space. The linear formatting and the last two words carry a feel of downward momentum.

train delays
the station cat's eyes
open and close

Wonderfully captures the expected arrival and departure of trains with the opening and closing of the cat's eyes as well as the boredom of waiting. There is a three-way resonance here between animals, people, and technology.

cherry blossoms
falling
in love again