

in the barrel
full of rain water
a morning star

Others depict interesting and sometimes surprising scenes:

sparkling fish
among the last pieces
of floating ice

Much of the commentary here is on the quiet, subtle moments of the countryside. For example:

trembling moonlight—
the shadow
of the willow

This is a large collection of beautiful poems and illustrations. It is stock full of pleasant and nuanced haiku on blossoms, frogs, butterflies, dew drops, and the moon. These are certainly tried-and-true subjects but Vasile portrays them in a way that makes them seem fresh and unique. If you love traditional nature haiku with a gentle and soft feeling to them then this is the book for you.



Jianqing Zheng. Delta Sun by Jianqing Zheng, Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2018, 100 pp. Free e-book available from the Haiku Foundation Digital Library (<https://www.thehaikufoundation.org/omeka/items/show/5505>)

Reviewed by John J. Han

Written by Jianqing Zheng, a Chinese American poet, scholar, and editor, *Delta Sun* is a collection of 56 haiku and 30 photographs set in the Mississippi Delta, also called the

Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. The region, which covers mostly northwest Mississippi, is an area rich in culture, history, and tradition. In a 1985 video presentation, James C. Cobb, a history professor at the University of Tennessee, called the Mississippi Delta “the most southern place on earth” to imply “a land of astounding economic and social disparity” (quoted in Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity*, Oxford UP, 1992, p. vii). Zheng’s *Delta Sun* captures some of the commonplace yet unforgettable images of the Mississippi Delta in haiku form. The landscape photos that grace some of the pages deepen a sense of place that permeates Zheng’s haiku.

This book pleasantly surprises the reader with many poems set in the natural world. Zheng’s haiku are predominantly *shasei* (sketches from life)—the kind of imagistic poems Yosa Buson and Masaoka Shiki wrote. Reminiscent of Wallace Stevens’ haikuesque sequence “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird,” *Delta Sun* portrays the various ways of looking at the sun in the Mississippi Delta. Below are two examples:

golden sunset
around the honeycomb
waggle-dancing bees

power outage
autumn twilight flickering
on the window

The first poem uses the technique of narrowing the focus—from the distant to the near. In the second piece, the loss of electricity awakens the poet to the beauty of nature, which may have escaped his attention amidst everyday drudgery.

Traditionally, the form of haiku tends to avoid conflict, instead seeking peace and harmony in life. The poems in *Delta Sun* are classic examples of serene haiku in which the everyday human world and the natural world blend into each other.

Here are two samples:

before evening class
viewing the sun-toned clouds
over campus

end of workday
the sun and I squint
at each other

Obviously, both haiku derive from the poet's working life. (Zheng is professor of English and chair of the Department of English & Foreign Languages at Mississippi Valley State University.) In the first poem, the speaker is on his way to the classroom when he notices the setting sun brightening the campus through clouds. Written at the close of a long day's work, the second haiku humorously personifies the sun, which seems to understand his weariness.

In another work-related haiku, the author uses the sun as an image in his comment on the struggles of college students today:

red sunrise
his bloodshot eyes
after night shift

By combining two different reds (the red sun and the reddened eyes), Zheng creates an objective correlative that portrays a student who must work overnight to pay for his college education. The poem also reflects the speaker's empathy for his student.

In some other haiku, Zheng celebrates the culture and history of the Mississippi Delta, as in two one-liners below:

autumn twilight over Money so sad so tragic so Emmett Till-ic

“sunset blues”—the shadow stretches longer and longer

The first poem memorializes the tragic death of Emmett Till (1941-55), a Chicago boy who was lynched in the town of Money for allegedly flirting with a white woman. The second poem celebrates Delta blues, which originated in this region. As blues music plays, the sun creates a lengthening shadow as if it were responding to the sound.

Delta Sun exemplifies a variety of contemporary haiku forms. Most of the poems are three-liners with a short/long/short pattern, but others are concrete poems of various lines and shapes. In addition to the “sunset blues” poem above, the volume showcases several one-liners, including the following:

delta sun so hot for so long for the whole summertime

In a way, the arrangement of words in this poem symbolizes the length of the season itself. Meanwhile, the following five-liner is shaped after the poem’s object itself:

a
water
k e t t l e
refracts sunlight
this quiet afternoon

Traditional Japanese haiku were written in a single vertical line, so one-line haiku in English is not an entirely novel concept. However, using multiple lines to create a shape haiku offers a new possibility in English-language haiku. Their playfulness and pictorial pleasure make the form an appealing structure for haiku poets of all ages. Kids will particularly enjoy learning this type of haiku, which is both legitimate and visually delightful.

Overall, Zheng’s volume compiles haiku that will turn a busy mind toward the beauty and wonders of nature so that it can

discover something new in ordinary surroundings. The poems are set in the Deep South, yet readers of other regions will easily relate to the scenes they portray and emotions they evoke. In this regard, *Delta Sun* is more than a collection of regional poetry; as all good literary texts do, it deals with the universal human experience by using regional materials. The tranquil and peaceful tone in the poems will also allow readers to sense the contentment a Chinese-born poet feels in Mississippi, which has been his home for decades. A significant addition to the growing body of English-language haiku, *Delta Sun* will not disappoint the reading audience.



call it haiku by vincent tripi (2018, bottle rockets press, Windsor CT and with tribe press Greenfield MA) available for \$15 from the author, vincent tripi, 91 Smith, Greenfield MA 01301. Make checks out to “Haiku Circle.”

Reviewed by Judson Evans

vincent tripi’s new *call it haiku* from bottle rockets press unfolds in a unique and effective direction because in place of analytic examination of haiku, tripi speaks of haiku in its own language. As he states early in the text: “Writing a haiku can be a response to a variety of needs. The need to speak to the subject. For the subject. With the subject...and, curiously enough, the need to be the subject. To be maple. To be bluebird...to be dragonfly...”

tripi’s pithy, vibrant text works in haibun form, offering scintillant fragments that isolate aspects of haiku experience, then leap and link forward and backward like renku. tripi’s claims for haiku seem particularly urgent in our current mediated, medicated, virtual world, where the primal sense of place and time have been adulterated by media, consumerism, and technology. While most treatments of haiku, for good reasons, emphasize the element of time in the haiku “moment”