

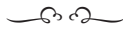
And:

out over the cliff's edge  
is where  
the dancing girls play

While I am not always sure just what some of the haiku are trying to get at the force of the images is often compelling. A few more to end this review:

laughter—  
the axe blade shines  
with rain

lavender vapor gray gun in the graveyard



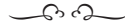
*Briefly Reviewed*

by Randy Brooks

*Ferry Crossing* edited by Patricia J. Machmiller (2019, Two Autumns Press, Santa Rosa, CA) 32 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Four-color card covers, saddle stitch. Available from Haiku Poets of Northern California, [www.hpnc.org](http://www.hpnc.org).

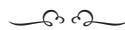
This chapbook features the work of four poets who read haiku at the 30th annual Two Autumns reading in San Francisco on August 25, 2019. As Machmiller explains in her preface, the book features “verse-bouquets by four esteemed haiku poets from around the North American haiku community.” The four poets are Terry Ann Carter from the Pacific Northwest, Garry Gay from San Francisco, Jessica Malone Latham from southern California, and Paul Miller from the east coast. The

title comes from Carter's haiku: *ferry crossing / she plays her cello / for the gulls*. From the ocean shore, Garry Gay writes: *Beach walk / a stray dog / brings me a stick*. Jessica Malone Latham provides a parent's perspective in this one: *shoes on the wrong feet / someday he'll ask a girl / to dance*. I will close with a favorite from Paul M: *summer rain / I bring some / into the bank*.



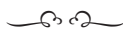
*Scratches on the Moon: A Haibun Collection* by Alexis Rotella (2019, Jade Mountain Press, Arnold, MD) 60 pages, 6" x 9". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781079980523.

In this collection of 47 haibun, Alexis Rotella provides an interesting mix of narrative perspectives, characters, and voice with the evocative ending leap of a haiku or punch of a senryu. The title comes from the haibun "Shocking the Neighbors" where "There are no secrets in this no-horse town where Mom will be waiting at the gate with a ping pong paddle." The haibun concludes with this angsty haiku: *The wind / leaves scratches / on the moon*. Several of the haibun draw on memories from the past, but rarely do they end with sentimental nostalgia for the "good old days." More often they reveal a darker side of people, struggling with challenges. For example, her haibun "Dark Figure" is a brief character sketch of "James Vanderhoof" who is "built like a hulk" and "chases the girls and hugs us until we can hardly breathe". After this bully meets his match in the form of a "stacked" new girl, the subsequent haiku is: *Blackberries / the unseen bruises / of childhood*. As a masterful writer, we can never tell whether these are fictional or creative nonfiction, but the emotions conveyed are real enough for us to feel and know them as genuine.



*A Taste of Issa: Haiku* by Issa Kobayashi, translated by David G. Lanoue (2019, HaikuGuy.com, New Orleans, LA) 456 pages, 5.25" x 8". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781733301619.

This is an enhanced edition of Lanoue's previous collection of Issa haiku translations, *Issa's Best: A Translator's Selection of Master Haiku* published in 2012. This edition includes the Japanese kanji and a Romanized transliteration of each haiku. Lanoue has also added some critical commentary beneath some translations. The book is arranged as before with a short biographical overview about Issa and six sections of haiku organized by season. There is a final short section of haiku without season words. I enjoy Lanoue's accurate translations of Issa's playful haiku that convey spontaneous response to everyday life in Japan. Here is a sampling of favorite haiku from each section. From New Year's: *on New Year's Day / I have company / bird without a nest*. Spring: *spring rain— / a child gives a dance lesson / to the cat*. Summer: *cool air— / my wife chases a mosquito / with a spoon*. Autumn: *in my sake cup / down the hatch! / the Milky Way*. Winter: *from the tip / of the field Buddha's nose ... / an icicle*. And from Haiku without Season Words: *my dead mother— / every time I see the ocean / every time...*, Lanoue asserts that Issa's haiku are a world treasure that speak to contemporary readers. "He is a poet who speaks to our common humanity in a way that is so honest, so contemporary, his verses might have been written this morning. Basho is the most revered of the haiku poets of Old Japan, but Issa is the most loved." This collection of Issa's best haiku and Lanoue's very accessible translations help share the good news of Issa's compassionate haiku.



*Stumbling Toward Happiness: Haibun and Hybrid Poems* by Kat Lehmann (2019, 29 Trees Press) 96 pages, 6" x 9". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781096125372

In this collection of haibun and tanka prose, Kat Lehmann

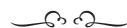
explains that she “started this book in 2006 when I was on maternity leave with my first child. Of course, I didn’t know it was a book at the time. I was just writing myself into some sort of understanding about how we pull ourselves from loss to find life again, how we love when moments are fleeting, and how we find the courage to push the old cycle forward until it spirals into something satisfying and new.” I enjoy the continuous voice of contemplation throughout this collection. Here is an example of one of her haibun.

fervent

How many times do we encounter fire before we learn to avoid it? Do we return to see if fire is still hot? Do we blame ourselves for the fire’s heat? How long do we ruminate on its bite or feel shame for not tolerating its sting? Fire does not apologize for being fire, and we do not need to apologize for dropping what threatens to consume us. Not everything is meant for us. Nor would we want it to be.

inside I know  
I was once a sun  
hot flashes

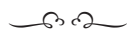
These are not fictional hybrid poems but rather “an ongoing conversation with myself” with interludes of subsequent haiku and tanka. Rather than explore characters or distant times and places, we get a sense of being in today’s thoughtful reflection. The book’s title comes from Lehmann’s view of self-development. “We will never be finished or fully arrive, nor is this necessary. Our perfect imperfection encourages us to grow in compassion and discover life as a stumble—a glorious stumble in which we learn by tripping ourselves open, our hearts expanding with every shattering fall and defiant rise.” As readers we are invited to join her in a mindful search, *Stumbling Toward Happiness*.



*Yone Noguchi The Stream of Fate: Volume 1 The Western Sea* by Edward Marx (2019, Botchan Books, Santa Barbara, CA) 414 pages, 6" x 9". Hardback. ISBN 9781939913050. Available from botchanmedia.com

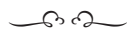
In this literary biography, Edward Marx reviews the early years of Yone Noguchi's development and mixed success as an American writer. As volume one, this book starts with Noguchi's youth in Japan from 1875-1893 and progresses from his startup in California and subsequent journey Eastward to Chicago, New York, London and back to Boston from 1893-1904. Presumably there will be a volume two that examines his later literary career. In this book, Marx characterizes Noguchi as a "classic example of a literary trickster: a writer whose work is very often not what it seems" (31). For example, he notes that Noguchi criticized the "inauthentic Orientalism" of works like *Madame Butterfly* but employs the same "inauthentic dialect" in his novel, *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl*. His poetry has always received mixed reviews, including accusations that he plagiarized from Poe after his first collection. For scholars of haiku in English, Noguchi is known as one of the earliest, perhaps THE first writer of haiku in English. While this is not the focus of the biography, Marx summarizes the mixed recognition of Noguchi as a pioneer of English language haiku. Scholars of Japanese literature have not viewed him as knowledgeable about Japanese literature and scholars of Asian American studies dismissed him "as an 'Americanized Asian' whose work 'said nothing about Asian America'" (27). However, Dr. Yoshinobu Hakutani argues that Noguchi was a "gifted Japanese American poet" who explored the cross-cultural developments that led to modernist poetry. In his dissertation, Marx closely examines Noguchi's "role as both forerunner and influence in the history of modernist poetry... and as a cultural liaison between East and West" (28). Leading scholars in the haiku community, such as William J. Higginson, have noted Noguchi's pioneering haiku but not viewed his work as effective examples of the literary art. Marx includes an interesting account of Noguchi's "Proposal to American

Poets” to write haiku. He writes that “Hokku (seventeen-syllable poem) is like a tiny star, mind you, carrying the whole sky at its back. It is like a slightly-open door, where you may steal into the realm of poesy. It is simply a guiding lamp. Its value depends on how much it suggests. The Hokku poet’s chief aim is to impress the reader with the high atmosphere in which he is living” (354). Here is one of Noguchi’s hokku: *Fallen leaves! Nay, spirits? / Shall I go downward with thee / ‘Long a stream of Fate?* (354). I admire the fact that Noguchi carried a collection of Basho’s haiku with him throughout his journeys and obviously discussed these with several poets during this time period. However, the examples of his translations and original work appear to be too “poetic” in the worst way possible. Indeed, in his original work he seems to be a poser, a mysterious trickster. In this biography Edward Marx does an outstanding job weighing the literary contributions of Yone Noguchi and the cross-cultural exchanges of Japanese and American poetry evident in his career.



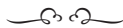
*Look Closely: A Collection of Haiku* by David H. Rosen (2019, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR) 85 pages, 5” x 8”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9781532687921.

David H. Rosen approaches haiku with a “just say what I’m thinking or feeling” approach. Sometimes it seems that he is talking out loud as in statements such as: *I didn’t go to med school for nothing* or *Call it paradise, if you like*. But many of his haiku call for a double-take as in the title poem: *Look closely— / wind blown / lavender and me*. Some are just whimsical: *Dreaming / I was a turtle... / that’s slow*; and one more: *Tomorrow, I’ll be a / marigold*.



*Hog Wild: Haiku* edited by Corine Timmer (2019, Bicaideideias Books, Estoi, Portugal) 44 pages, 5.25” x 8”. Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 9789899976030.

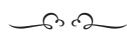
This is the second in a series of short haiku collections celebrating the Chinese calendar animal of the year. Last year Corine Timmer edited *Barking Mad*, celebrating the year of the dog. And this year we get the pleasure of *Hog Wild*, featuring haiku celebrating the year of the pig. The book is illustrated with playful pebble sculptures by the editor that provide a whimsical space for us to encounter and enjoy the life of pigs. As I said for the back cover, you might think of pigs as dreary domesticated farm animals, but in this collection, they are frisky and alive with curiosity—like us. The pig haiku portray a wide range of perspectives such as this touching haiku by Joseph Robello: *the soft skin / behind the sow’s ears / spring morning*. I love the motion in this one by Jennifer Hambrick: *Jell-O cubes / a wiggling pile / of piglets*. Of course, no collection of pig haiku would be complete without Marlene Mountain’s famous minimal poem: *pig and i spring rain*. Corine Timmer features companionship in this haiku: *sweet chestnuts / in the forest / a man walks his pig*. My favorite is the closing haiku by Lori A Minor: *still friends / after all these years / plush piglet*.



*The Heart of Margravine: Haiku 2008-2019* edited by David Jacobs (2019, London, UK) 16 pages, 5.75” x 8.25”. Four-color card covers, saddle stitched. No ISBN. David Jacobs, 72 St. Dunstan’s Road, London, W6 8RA, UK.

In this interesting booklet, David Jacobs has gathered poems “that have appeared variously over the years, primarily on the Margravine notice board and sometimes in the newsletter published by “The Friends of Margravine Cemetery”. Evidently several leading British haiku poets have celebrated

this cemetery in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. This collection features the work of six writers whose haiku celebrate the seasonal life of the cemetery. David Jacobs writes: *a short cut / through children's graves / the morning sun*. Several of the haiku mention the old broken-ness of headstones as in this one by Tony (A.A.) Marcoff: *cold grey rain / the broken head / of the angel*. Diana Webb, current editor of *Time Haiku*, writes: *on grass between graves / a circle of picnickers / a lime seed spirals down*, which simultaneously portrays a whimsical ephemeral dropping seed and the social nature of a cemetery. A friend of mine who works for a cemetery once said that cemeteries are mostly for the living, but the dead don't mind folks hanging around. This collection invites us to enter the Margravine Cemetery through haiku. I'll end with this one by Frank Williams: *sailor's grave / now a land-lubber / for eternity*.



*Sunshine Blooms & Haiku* by Sneha Sundaram (2019, Middletown, DE) 148 pages, 5.25" x 8". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN 978-0578601748. \$14.99 from Amazon or the author at [www.snedhasundaram.com](http://www.snedhasundaram.com).

*Sunshine Blooms & Haiku* is a delightful first collection of haiku by a relatively new English language haiku writer, Sneha Sundaram. Since about 2013 her work has been winning several awards and has been appearing in a wide range of international haiku journals. Arranged through the seasons, Sundaram's haiku excel at balancing images of the moment with movement of the heart. For example, in one of her Spring haiku she writes: *waiting for you / to make the first move / cherry blossoms*. How long will this opportunity to enjoy the cherry blossoms last? How long will this opportunity for a first move last before it passes? I like her haiku because they are simple, employing conversational language, but also offering significant contemplation. In these haiku Sundaram does not



contort language nor twist images into metaphors to do her poetic bidding. She does not try to spice up her haiku with flash and sizzle for shock value. She simply builds a scene and gives us genuine heartfelt human response. Consider this favorite of mine: *nesting swans / the house we built / many years ago*. I see a couple watching swans nesting, building a life for their young ones. The couple remembers their own nesting from a springtime many years ago. Her observation of how ephemeral our lives are is evident in this haiku as well: *how quickly / they grow up.../ soap bubbles*. Here's a couple more favorites: *jumping puddles / nowadays we run inside / when it rains* and: *back to school / my grandson explains / yolo*. I will end with two favorites related to the experience of loss: *spring cleaning.../ I store your memories / in Ziplock* and: *taking / my secrets with him / melting snowman*. This is an outstanding collection of haiku that share a wide range of emotions and significant understanding from lived experience. I recommend that you buy a copy of Sneha Sundaram's book to keep on the top shelf of your haiku library.