

*A Portable Universe* by Mark Gilfillan, 2019, Alba Publishing, [www.albapublishing.com](http://www.albapublishing.com), P.O. Box 266, Uxbridge, UB9 5NX, U.K., 96 pages, perfect bound

*Reviewed by Tom Clausen*

While reading *A Portable Universe*, the second collection of haiku and senryu by Mark Gilfillan this quote from R. H. Blyth came to mind:

“The sun shines, snow falls, mountains rise and valleys sink, night deepens and pales into day, but it is only very seldom that we attend to such things. . . . When we are grasping the inexpressible meaning of these things, this is life, this is living. To do this twenty-four hours a day is the Way of Haiku. It is having life more abundantly.”

– Reginald Horace Blyth

*A Portable Universe* showcases poet Mark Gilfillan ‘having life more abundantly.’ Featuring 182 poems, two per page, in two sections; *Turning the Stone Over* and *Svakia*, South West Crete, the book has a wonderful cover photo of a rope handled jar containing illuminated water with ‘a portable universe’ of what may be tiny tadpoles or some little water born lives. The poems are compelling throughout this substantial collection and I enjoyed many wonderfully unique and appealing haiku and senryu in Mark Gilfillan’s second book .

I found the following to be entirely memorable and rewarding (and no doubt each reader will discover their own set of favorites in this bountiful collection) .

night train  
the briefly lit lives  
of others

reacquainted  
brushing the Buddha's belly  
a Siamese cat

closely observed  
by a mother-to-be  
a swan tends her young

Dad's bedroom  
little stacks of bedside coins  
a child's fascination

two fathoms down  
reflecting back the sun's rays  
the silvery anchor

A Portable Universe reflects the life of a poet who has a keen awareness to observe and 'take in' the wonders of reality at each turn on his way. There is a refreshing celebration of nuance in nature and humanity that moves Mark Gilfillan to write what he sees and experiences in a poetic way that is well worth the reading. There is a lot to like in this universe!

In closing, here are two more favorites that express the quality that can be found throughout the Portable Universe.

ten thousand screams  
that worn patch  
beneath the swing

beach driftwood all the rough edges rounded

