

Here are three examples of many that reward rereading:

rows of maize
we put our affairs
in order

Debbie Strange

blackberries
we all have our own
small scars

Kath Abela Wilson

we say goodbye
as if we mean it
bone moon

J. Zimmerman □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY RANDY BROOKS

Mountains and Loons: Memories of Baxter State Park - A Haibun by Nancy Orr (Independently published, Lewistown, ME: 2023) 44 pages. 6" x 9". ISBN 979-8-8525300-7-3. Paperback, perfect-bound. \$8 from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

In *Mountains and Loons*, Nancy Orr shares a memoir about the significance of Baxter State Park in Maine to her family over the last seventy years. She opens with some of the history of Baxter State Park and its most well-known mountain, Katahdin, sacred grounds for the Wabanaki people. Orr starts with her first climb of the mountain in 1952 when she was five years old. From these early visits, she knows the mountain and its sites, for example, climbing Cathedral Trail down to the Saddle for a camp near Chimney Pond. Her haiku bring these memories to the present:

six young campers / scamper ahead / across Knife Edge. From a 1957 visit to Russell Pond, she writes: *loons wail / wilding / my heart.* In 1985 the family moved back to Maine and renewed their connection to the park. From a 2004 visit, she shares: *two moose / block the outhouse trail / apologies accepted.* And in 2008 she returned to spread her father's ashes on the Center Ridge Trail. In an age where we suffer from a loss of connection to nature, this haibun reminds us that specific encounters and wild places can give us a lifetime of blessings. What have you done lately to wild your heart? □■

Grace: Kiyoko and Kiyoshi Tokutomi's Haiku Life by Patricia J. Machmiller (Frog on the Moon, A Small Press, Cupertino, CA: 2023) 34 pages, 8.5" x 8.5". Four-color card covers, perfect bound. ISBN 979-8-9880696-1-4. \$18 from the author at: patriciajmachmiller@msn.com.

Grace is a short biography about Kiyoko and Kiyoshi Tokutomi, founders of the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, written as a series of haibun by life-long friend and poet, Patricia J. Machmiller. These haibun provide a biographical overview sharing the grace of a haiku poet's life, including Machmiller's personal reflections on their friendship, guidance, and teaching. The haibun are not presented in chronological order, but are rather based on different life experiences, such as immigration, war, retirement, and becoming a haiku poet. The book title comes from a haibun portraying Kiyoko's calm in the middle of kitchen chaos. Here is the subsequent haiku: *revolution / of a calla lily — / the shape of prayer.* Some of the final haibun feature a return to Japan, including blossom viewing on Mt. Yoshino: *smiling mountain / we do not yet know / what's in store* and *cherry blossoms / shrouded in haze / an unseen grave.* □■

Voyage: Vista and Verse Monoku, Haiku, Senryu by JL Huffman (JdArcRaven Press, Blue Ridge Mountains, NC: 2022) 112 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Paperback, perfect bound. ISBN 979-8371485601.

Inspired by her extensive travels after retirement, *Voyage* is a collection of JL Huffman's poems, often illustrated with photographs. The poems are a mix of verse, monoku, and haiku like this one: *the walker packs / a Bible and an atlas / two roadmaps*. From her visit to the Blue Ridge Mountains, she writes: *copperhead / coiled on the doorstep / unwelcome mat*. The collection reads like a slide show with poetic commentary. From Bhutan she shares this image: *toothless grandma / butter tea served in / chipped unmatched cups*. I would say that JL Huffman is enjoying her retired life of travel, photography, and writing. □■

Touching His Scar by Mary McCormack (Self-published: 2023) 30 pages, 5.25" x 8". Four-color card covers, perfect bound. ISBN 978-0-9981720-5-7. \$9 from amazon.com.

Touching His Scar is a collection of phrases, comments, and haiku on the devastation of war. For example, the book starts with the comment *war / undiluted / horror*. Here is a phrase from the third page: *hardened / by all this / anger* and a very true statement: *going to war / means never coming back / the same*. There are poignant haiku as well, including: *wind in the reeds / long after their deaths / ripples* and an effective senryu: *returned from war / the only one he talks to / his tiny niece*. The book closes with the title poem: *her / hand / touching / his / scar*. □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

Eira by Lew Watts (Snapshot Press, UK: 2023). 108 pages, 7¾" x 5⅛". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-903543-56-6. Prices vary based on location. Order directly from <https://www.snapshotpress.co.uk/books/eira.htm>

This is a courageous book of 38 haibun and 69 individual haiku by Lew Watts. This high-quality collection starts with a haibun about the psychological challenges of becoming a U.S. citizen, followed by this haiku: *bitter wind / unable to answer / in my mother tongue*. The title of the first haibun "Hiraeth" is a Welsh word that means "a deep yearning for a home, a place, or a time one can never return to, or perhaps that never was." This becomes a powerful and heart-wrenching theme in this book. Watts writes about life with his family and many of his haibun have a noticeable religious influence. Some of his memories are haunting, and several haiku reveal the past with vivid imagery: *class reunion — / her lips the same color / as his scar*. Indeed, Watts is not afraid to write about the many challenges of life that include bullying, family separation, relationship challenges, and divorce: *trial separation / another inch of snow / on the gin bottles*. There are physical and psychological bruises in these haibun and haiku, and death. As an example, the geological expertise in the author's haibun "Deposition" is hauntingly juxtaposed with a haiku about his mother's death. The stories of his life and his mother's life seem to have become ingrained in the layered stories of the Earth. The last haibun reveals the name Eira, which is the Welsh word for snow, and forms the title of this book. The qualities of snow, its dangers (and sometimes, its soft and beautiful appearance) makes Eira a powerful reverberation that echoes throughout this collection. Everything seems to come full circle: by the end of reading this book, I was left with that same feeling of hiraeth at the beginning: a deep yearning for home. After the last page is read, I think readers will be inspired to distill their past in writing and face subjects and events that are difficult to write about. With courage and honesty, Watts has shown us a way. I highly recommend this book. ◻■

SEA CHANGE: An Anthology of Single-Line Poems: Selections from whiptail: journal of the single-line poem, Issues 1-7, edited by Kat Lehmann and Robin Smith (whiptail press, Wilmington, NC: 2024 & in collaboration with Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 106 pages, 8.25" x 8.25". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-951675-10-3. \$15 from redmoonpress.com

This is an anthology of 84 one-line poems that are mostly one-line haiku (aka, the monoku, single-line haiku or monostitch) selected from *whiptail: journal of the single-line poem*, which is the first journal dedicated to exclusively publishing one-line poems in English. In the foreword, Jim Kacian reminds us that the hokku in Japanese is written in a single line, vertically. Since the birth of haiku, it has grown into a global tree with many branches, and the single-line haiku forms several branches, yet also takes us back to the ancient roots of the hokku. Single-line haiku in English is a versatile form, often offering multiple readings. *SEA CHANGE* features one-line poems in experimental formats as well: one poem bends the words into a string that forms a balloon. In another single-line haiku, all the letters are squished together with no spaces. A few one-line haiku have a cascading format or are arranged vertically, but most of the poems are written horizontally. A few poems are also quite long and can be read as one-line tanka. A few favorites: (1) *almost gone the word for pain in my mother tongue* (Antoinette Cheung), (2) *deep time translating the raven's voice* (Kristen Lindquist), and (3) *storm petrels until nothing left of your name* (Lew Watts). In Antoinette's monoku, there is the heartache of losing a language and the past. In Kristen's monoku, there is the beautiful notion of translating the raven's voice in a vast perspective. In Lew's monoku, I feel pulled into a space of letting go of someone or perhaps facing someone's death. In addition, the transience of our names in his poem seems to become a kind of meditation on impermanence. Nature, identity, and social challenges are the main themes found throughout: they are the invisible threads that weave this beautiful book together. I think this anthology will plant a seed to inspire more poets to write one-line haiku for many years to come. □■

Vital Signs by Deborah P Kolodji (Cuttlefish Books, USA: 2024). 96 pages, 4" x 6". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1735025780. \$10 from Amazon and other online booksellers.

Deborah P Kolodji is an established and well-known figure in the English-language haiku community. After acknowledging haiku journal and anthology editors, she writes: "for the wonderful women of my cancer support group and the doctors, nurses and staff of USC Norris Cancer Hospital." In the Author's Note, Kolodji writes about her cancer journey and explains how the California Condor bird (pictured on the cover of the book), which was once on the brink of extinction, is a metaphor for people with cancer, symbolizing the fight for survival. Here are four haiku that stood out to me: (1) *sturgeon moon / my pillowcase covered / with fallen hair*, (2) *away from all / I've ever known / fallen camellia*, (3) *murky water / a turtle scrambles over / the fallen palm*, and (4) *swallowtails / my own private / ghosts*. While I feel a few poems have room for improvement due to telling emotions with words such as "melancholy," "sadness," and "loneliness," Kolodji wrote the 78 haiku/senryū in this book with courage and honesty, and the above examples reveal quality work. In turn, I found the majority of the poems provide a real glimpse into what it's like to have cancer and be treated in a hospital setting. As expected, Kolodji's impressive list of publication credits reinstates her dedication to haiku and her love for the form. In short, I think *Vital Signs* will support other people fighting cancer through shared challenges and thereby they'll feel less alone on their journeys, hopefully on the path to recovery. □■

Carousel by Roberta Beary (Snapshot Press, Ormskirk, United Kingdom: 2024). # pages, 5.5" x 8". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-903543-57-3. £ 12.99 GBP from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

This is a high-quality collection of 86 haiku and senryu by Roberta Beary that spans a vast range of subjects, including nature-based scenes, childhood, relationships, family psychology, divorce,

surgery, hospice, and death. While *Carousel* begins with this poem: *daybreak / lilies light / the light*, the majority of the poems are steeped in melancholy and mystery, as Beary navigates challenging events in her life and darker times. This haiku stood out in the beginning pages: *abandoned mill / the dark water keeps / its secrets*. I think this haunting image could easily be the start of a mystery novel or a movie. I also appreciate the juxtaposition in this poem: *born this way . . . / the orientation / of winter stars*, which is highly relevant to the topics of identity and genetics. There are some religious terms that find their way into some of the poems as well. Here is another haiku that's steeped in loss and letting go: *morphine drip / my father asks me / for more time*. There are a few poems that come across as humorous. However, overall, the psychological depth of this collection takes precedence. Here are a few more haiku that stood out to me: (1) *old plum tree / father's watch heavy / on my wrist*, and (2) *summer dusk / the piano mover covers / his scar*. Beary courageously reveals her own psychological scars in this collection. Perhaps the title *Carousel* speaks of the cycles of life, but it's simultaneously a portal into Beary's childhood. I recommend this book. ■

REVIEWED BY EVONNE ELLIS

Consoling Nature by Joshua Eric Williams (Independently published: 2022). 118 pages, 8.5" x 11". Paperback, perfect softbound. ISBN: 979-8443866239. \$18 from amazon.com

In *Consoling Nature*, Joshua Eric Williams layers vibrant imagery with literary depth, erasing man-made boundaries between nature and humanity and revealing our inherent connection. Williams' work invites readers to an experience akin to an art museum exhibit adorned with poetry inlaid in image, inspiring readers to sit with his words and examine each page with renewed insight.

In the 17th century, writers and artists collaborated on renga scrolls at social gatherings, co-creating the earliest forms of haiga on the page. Though Williams works alone, his haiga is rooted in tradition and contains a more organic syllabic count

than Westernized haiku. He also adds a touch of Frank O'Hara's defamiliarization with lines like: *pollened dawn / red birds / drink themselves*. This technique lends to a surprise element and a surrealist feel in Williams' work, starting with the first haiku in his collection: *the creek / dreams of flying / morning haze*."

Haiku is one of the earliest forms of eco poetry, and Williams bridges the natural element of this practice. This is the essence of *Consoling Nature*. It is a tribute to the ways nature and humanity collide. Williams invites readers to allow their thoughts to unravel and sink into moments that some may call "Zen" with lines such as: *becoming / the soil / breathing* and *wild iris / always / looking in* accompanied by an image of arms and hands reaching out alongside limbs of a tree trunk. We are also reminded of what it's like to live in current climate extremes: *another drought / all I want is to take off / my clothes*.

Consoling Nature is Williams' third book, followed by his chapbook *The Distant Wild* published by Kattywompus Press and *The Strangest Conversation*, a collection awarded honorable mention in the Haiku Society of America's 2020 Merit Book Awards and published by Red Moon Press. His poetry has been published in *Atticus Review*, *Literary Matters*, *Rattle*, *Frogpond*, and *Modern Haiku*.

Joshua Eric Williams inspires one to look beyond what meets the eye, layering complexity and depth in each of his lines. Brilliant graphic illustrations add a third dimension of meaning to the arc of each haiku on the page. *Consoling Nature* is a testament to how the natural world is not apart from us but part of us and how everything around us is connected even when juxtaposed. □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY LISA GERLITS

Rust by Elmedin Kadric (Red Moon Press, Winchester VA: 2023). 104 pages. 4.25" x 6.5". Color covers, perfectbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-29-2. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

In this collection, Elmedin Kadric delivers an inventive, playful, and complex look at the human condition. In eight short, untitled sections, he addresses themes of silence, starting over, loneliness, and relationships. While he doesn't shy away from deeply emotional content, Kadric employs a light touch that serves to soften the heaviest of topics. The real delight of this collection is Kadric's subtle wordplay, palindromic phrases, vertical poems, and imaginative leaps. He also uses word mashups that hint and reveal but leave readers to make their own meaning. The poems are sequenced to exert a push-pull tension on the reader, and the more experimental ones are better read within the context of the collection. Here are a few gems to whet the appetite: (1) *living alone / telling one cry of a crow / from another*; (2) *spring shoots another man in the woods*; (3) *morf from form*; (4) *a war veteran / with eyes closed / leaf viewing*. □■

Island by Kristen Lindquist (Red Moon Press, Winchester VA: 2023). 98 pages. 4.25" x 6.5". Color covers, perfectbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-28-5. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

In her latest collection, Kristen Lindquist takes the reader on an island journey. Right away, in the opening haibun, she roots us in the setting by exploring the shoreline—detritus, sunburst lichen, and yellow periwinkles. She gets the reader asking big questions by focusing on the microscopic, drawing us outward by drawing us inward. The collection continues in that vein. Divided into three sections of haiku, each section is capped with a haibun that allows Lindquist to flex her prose muscles, poke at the meaning of our existence, and invite the reader into a new perspective. With gorgeous precision of language and deft juxtapositions

that immediately satisfy but also promise deeper insights with successive reading, Lindquist celebrates the cycles and mysteries of life through a Maine island lens. Her snapshots are sometimes magical: *grey seals in surf / the tingling skin / of my selfie self*. And sometimes grim: *first day of fall / the dead snake's tail / still twitching*. But always illuminating: *puffs of pollen / a warbler's passage / through spruce*. Do not miss out on this richly detailed, infinitely layered collection. □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

Music for Monoliths by Miriam Sagan (cyberwit.net, India: 2023). 66 pages, 5" x 8". Paperback. ISBN: 978-81-19228-87-4. \$15 from cyberwit.net

Psychology, nature, and relationships are interwoven in this collection of 59 tanka by Miriam Sagan. Some tanka focus on daily life and her connections with people and the Earth, while others read as meditations on human mortality. There are a few tanka that have interesting and fresh juxtapositions. The following tanka speaks directly to environmental damage and the health consequences of mining: *half life / of uranium / older than mountains— / radiation for the / miner's lung cancer*. Here is another tanka that speaks of socioeconomic challenges: *Ganesh sells earrings / in the jewelry store window / the poet / works at Starbuck's now / for better pay*. My two favorite tanka in this collection are (1) *under my pillow / not a tooth for the fairy / but an elm seed / that grows like a beanstalk / into dreams above the clouds*, and (2) *autumn leaves / an ordinary house / how can my story / begin until I close / this door behind me*? I found one paragraph in Sagan's afterword to be particularly inspiring when she writes: "Large rocks always seem to be humming to me. I wanted to capture some of this music of the earth. I also always carry a tiny notebook and have found myself scribbling when listening to live music. Numerous musical compositions and some visual art are the direct inspiration for a variety of tanka. The Notes list these sources with my gratitude." Overall, while I feel a few tanka have room for improvement, there are some gems

in this book. I think readers will be inspired by Sagan's poems to write their own tanka on a variety of themes and subjects. □■

To Tower Above Me Still: Tree Haiku & More At Creekside Park by Robert Epstein (Independently Published, 2024). 150 pages. 5" x 8". ISBN: 979-8872512561. \$15 from amazon.com

As with previous anthologies edited by Robert Epstein, he starts this book with inspirational quotes. In this case, the quotes are focused on trees. As two examples: "*The trees that are slow to grow bear the best fruit.*" (Moliere), and "*The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.*" (Ralph Waldo Emerson). Epstein then plants the seeds of this book by honoring Henry D. Thoreau and John Muir in his preface, and also summarizes his own healing journey while visiting Hal Brown Park at Creekside (which he simply names Creekside Park). Epstein finishes the preface with a hope for the haiku community to focus on nature and connect with each other through nature-based haiku vs. veer too far away into surrealism. The poems and photos in this book are organized into five main sections: 1) Trees, Leaves & Stumps, 2) Birds, Animals & Insects, 3) The Creek, 4) The Elements, and 5) Humans. Here are five haiku that stood out to me: (1) *lichen — / all the things / I still cling to*, (2) *white butterfly / I am also ready / to surrender*, (3) *lost in thought thud of an acorn*, (4) *asking for nothing / an old man picks up / creekside trash*, and (5) *crackling magic — / how the creek runs / through my fireplace*. While I feel some haiku have room for improvement, and some seem to read as spiritually inspired short poems, I think Epstein's personal connection with Creekside Park will inspire others to find solace and healing within local parks or their own backyard. I appreciate Epstein's attitude of gratitude and his spirit of connection. Epstein reminds us that even within a city, we can find inspiration in nature. □■

Building Bridges by Roy Kindelberger (*Poet's Choice*, 2024). 64 pages. 5.5" x 8.5". Paperback. ISBN: 978-81193351787. \$22.50 from www.poetschoice.in

This is a thoughtful solo anthology of haiku, tanka, and tanka stories by Roy Kindelberger. All the poems are originally published in a journal, book, or anthology. Kindelberger's poetry spans a variety of subjects, including the setting of the North Cascades and the Puget Sound where he lives and teaches. The following haiku stood out to me: (1) *rocky shore— / the footprints that couldn't / be found*, (2) *he holds a ripe / tomato in his hand / grandpa's last photo*, and (3) *empty glasses— / she only left behind / her lipstick*. I also enjoyed his tanka in this book. Here are a few favorites: (1) *grandma sews her quilts / while grandpa tells stories / in the parlor / both embroidering / in their own way*, and (2) *deaths door / opens wider each day / a new journey / silently I put my arm / around his shoulder*. This second example is found at the end of a tanka story titled "World to Come," which is about a man who has Alzheimer's disease. I found many of Kindelberger's tanka have a relaxed rhythm and tone, such as: *sunset / over a quiet river / evening cricket song / I turn off / the radio*. I think readers who write haiku will be inspired to branch out and write tanka and tanka stories after reading this book. I also feel the concision of Kindelberger's prose works well with his tanka. In short, this is a thoughtful solo anthology of poetry that is modest in size. The publication credits include the following journals: *Frogpond*, *Scarlet Dragonfly*, *Ribbons*, and *Colorado Boulevard*. I recommend this book. □■

Grasping the Fading Light: A Journey through PTSD by Julie Bloss Kelsey (*Jacar Press*, Durham, NC: 2023). 42 pages, 6" x 9". Paperback. ISBN: 978-0-936481-24-1. \$14 from www.sablebooks.org

This is a courageous and award-winning collection of haiku and tanka by Julie Bloss Kelsey. The poems in this book focus on what it's like to live with PTSD, unfortunately, due to past traumatic experiences. This book was a winner of the 2021 International Women's Haiku Contest from Sable Books. The testimonial

on the back cover by the final judge, Kala Ramesh, remarks: "This manuscript has a global feel in spite of it being a personal experience...One very important point to be noted is the healing that takes place as the pages unfold." Indeed, Kelsey's honesty comes through, even through her darkest moments. Here are three poems that stood out to me: (1) *sliver of moon / still hanging on / to my illusions*, (2) *beneath the pounding / of a construction site / the creek's burble*, and (3) *cloudbreak — / my inner child / takes my hand*. This tanka also stood out to me: *the sketchbook / I keep in the back / of my closet — / so much of my life / left untouched*. While there are a significant amount of poems that reveal the complex psychology of living with PTSD and the melancholy and shame that can come with it, there are a handful of hopeful poems in this book as well. I was uplifted by this tanka towards the end of the book: *reunified / I find myself / at the beach — / driftwood arms full / of seaweed blankets*. One can feel the healing power of connecting or reunifying with nature in this tanka. I can only express sincere gratitude to Kelsey for her courage to write this book and can only send my very best wishes on her journey going forward. ■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY PIPPA PHILLIPS

Brushstrokes by Mary McCormack (Independently published, CreateSpace: 2023). 56 pages. 5.25" x 8". Paperback. ISBN: 978-0998172026. \$9.99 from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Reading Mary McCormack's *Brushstrokes* is like listening to a friend tell you all about the first rush of a new love. The collection is at turns intimate and prosaic, alternating between the comfort and eroticism of an embrace. Its governing romanticism is imbued with a sense of crisp naturalism. McCormack is at her best when indirect, displacing limerence onto the flora that surrounds the volume's lovers, as in:

springing up
within me
wild violets

The innocence of love occasionally bubbles up like a spring, releasing a heady joy that runs through the text like an overfast heartbeat:

just can't
get enough—
bumblebee

Some of her poems are plaintive and emotionally straightforward, or as comfortable as a hand clasped in yours. When it comes to eroticism, McCormack understands that subtlety is key. Some of her poems are downright sexy:

feeling my heartbeat
down
there

McCormack explores what is essentially human to sexual connection and roots it in the human connection to nature. She has put together a tactile and potent collection of erotic poetry that is best enjoyed on a sun-dappled afternoon. □■

Faunistics: A Collection of Wild Haiku and Illustrations by R. C. Thomas (Nielsen: 2024). 151 pages. 5" x 8". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1399968737. \$12.69 from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

R.C. Thomas is a poet who has published extensively in free form as well as haiku. Perhaps for this reason, the voice governing the haiku in his collection *Faunistics* is richly developed and highly idiosyncratic. Thomas guides us on a sort of global poetry zoo tour, taking us on ginko walks to visit glow worms, city foxes, extinct creatures, and the images of animals in volcanic ash. Thomas's bestial *saijiki* is supplemented by charmingly rendered illustrations, making the book a real keepsake of a chapbook.

Thomas's poems are meaty and specific, rich with wordplay and double meanings, such as in:

king tide—
Antarctic toothfish
begin to crown

The atmosphere of the collection is optimistic and full of keen insights. Some standout poems display jarring but inspired juxtapositions. In the following poem, the long time frame of linguistic change is yoked to an expulsion of octopus ink:

semantic change—
the quick syntax
of octopus ink

The repeated volar plosive of repeated k sounds contrasts with the sibilants that thread the poem. This is representative of a sophisticated and at times syncopated prosody that permeates Thomas's haiku. In sum, *Faunistics* is a welcome and whimsical work that's worth investing in. □■