

Haiku and senryu with clear images have the power to tap into the imaginations of the reader who will naturally develop their own meanings for the poems, whether or not they match the poet's thoughts. When Coram's entire chapbook is read in one sitting, a speculative biography emerges of a person who takes heed of the power of nature including human nature. He seeks cover when the wind storms, bears the angst and "unthrown stones" of marital conflict, and has the deeply felt love of children and the pain of their absence, whether they step on the school bus or leave us forever. These stories of life linger many days after reading them and will be appreciated by anyone who takes the time to ponder them. □■

#### REVIEWED BY BRAD BENNETT

*Natural Consequences* by John S. O'Connor (Brooks Books, Taylorville, IL: 2024). 59 pages, 4" x 5.75". ISBN: 9781929820337. \$15 from [brooksbooks.com](http://brooksbooks.com).

John O'Connor has been writing haiku for over twenty-five years. In an essay from Poetry Foundation's website called "A New View on Haiku," he credits Bob Speiss, editor of *Modern Haiku* from 1978-2002, as an early mentor. O'Connor has written two previous collections of haiku, *Room Full of Chairs* (2000) and *Things Being What They Are* (2011), both with Deep North Press. *Things Being What They Are* was awarded a Touchstone Honorable Mention by The Haiku Foundation. O'Connor has been an English teacher for thirty-seven years, teaching in multiple venues, from sixth grade through college. He's also written two books on the teaching of writing, *Wordplaygrounds* (2004) and *This Time It's Personal* (2011), both published by the National Council of Teachers of English. As a haiku poet and a teacher and student of writing, O'Connor seems to be on the lookout for everyday life lessons, those resonant teaching moments that emerge from haiku's close observation of daily existence.

*Natural Consequences*, a winner of a 2024 High/Coo Chapbook Award from Brooks Books, presents many valuable lessons learned. O'Connor reveals that the forty-nine haiku within

were written during very difficult times, including health challenges and the deaths of loved ones. The most important lesson he presents to his readers, then, is one of *mono no aware*, an acknowledgment of the inevitability and pathos of aging and dying that yields a deep appreciation for living. As he writes in a back cover blurb, “With a focus on living in the moment, haiku can be a healing practice: taking stock of all that we’ve lost and all that we’ve been given.” O’Connor gifts these poems to his readers in the hopes of building shared empathy, compassion, and resilience.

In the introduction, O’Connor explains that all of his haiku “... grow out of *actual*, present-tense moments I have personally experienced...” In an age of social media prompts, this writing approach may be less common than it once was. In his essay “A New View on Haiku,” O’Connor states, “When Bob [Spiess] suggested that haiku are not so much written as lived, I thought of Keat’s line that ‘Poems must come as easily as the leaves to the trees else they had not come at all.’” The haiku in *Natural Consequences* appear as effortless and captivating as spring maple leaves.

O’Connor is not afraid of writing about challenging and vulnerable subjects. Some of the haiku in this chapbook speak of death: *visitation— / my hand print stays / on the casket*. Others include some kind of rain, an apt setting and metaphor for this painful period in O’Connor’s life: *full of rain / the sky / inside this puddle*. A few poems in this chapbook also impart a kind of eerie or scary tension: *wildfires / once again we hide / all pills and steak knives*. In addition to being a teacher and writer, O’Connor is also a singer and has set poems to music. It makes sense, then, that music is the subject of some of these poems, as in: *blues guitarist / finding new ways to fret / the old songs*. The poems in this chapbook range from nature haiku to nature/human nature haiku to human nature senryu. Contemporary writers don’t always take full advantage of the depth that a senryu can

create, but many of O'Connor's senryu contain deftly conveyed, heartfelt, human emotion: 3 AM / I hold my breath to hear / your breath. Overall, O'Connor writes of real, poignant, challenging moments with vulnerability and compassion. We are grateful for the lessons he teaches us in *Natural Consequences*. □■

#### REVIEWED BY RANDY BROOKS

*A Silence or Two* by Jennifer Hambrick (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024) 150 pages, 4.25"x 6.5". Four-color card covers, perfectbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-42-1. \$20 from [redmoonpress.com](http://redmoonpress.com).

Jennifer Hambrick's collection, *A Silence or Two*, does not arrive with an author's introduction nor does it provide an overview of intentions. In short, the collection presents itself in silence and the reader has to find their own way into and through the poems. Based on reactions, some readers have primarily focused on the tone and recurring images found throughout. For example, from blurbs on the back cover, Cherie Hunter Day notices that the collection "is shot through with shadow and grief, longing and loss." Richard Gilbert sees the collection as a narrative journey "into body and soul with shockingly fresh directness and vulnerability, elucidating moments and living narratives as embodiments of love and loss ..." In a recent review, Paul Miller primarily reads the collection as an example of an abstract approach to haiku where writers create "linguistic hurdles for the reader ... that in some cases they add meaningful layers." While not necessarily appreciating this approach, Miller praises Hambrick as one of the "finest practitioners" of it. In this review, I will consider these three reading approaches and conclude with an appreciation for Hambrick's synthesis of traditional haiku techniques, narrative stances, and avant-garde micro-poetry goals.