

She liked the tone of heavy consonants in the first line but asked, “What is blood dusk? We don’t know.” She also said that “I don’t know what ‘sign language of memory is’ either.” So, this poem has intuitive instead of literal leaps. She says that traditional haiku tend to be based or rooted in some objective realism, but avant-garde tradition steps away from that, but not entirely.

Although written with poetic license and abstract images, I believe that Hambrick’s avant-garde haiku work by retaining certain aspects of traditional haiku. She employs the haiku cut carefully, and she also provides enough context from some suggested lived experience so that her poems are not entirely abstract. In the case of this collection, *A Silence or Two*, it is the narrative thread that provides an ongoing context of love, hope, pregnancy, loss, and grief that keeps the poems real. Individually, several of these poems would succeed at providing a reader with enough context to understand their emotional or psychological significance. Although written with abstractions, extended metaphors, and a confessional personal voice (me, my, our, I), this collection holds together for a satisfying literary experience. Her avant-garde haiku are both poetic and emotionally realistic at the same time. They provide openings to the imagination and the heartfelt human experience treasured so much in all haiku. While the overall tone might be dark, apocalyptic, and heavy with grief, they constitute a literary truth telling we all can appreciate. ◻■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

Sine Qua Non: Haiku and Tanka by Elliot Nicely (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 108 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-44-5. \$20. Order from the poet directly at: elliotnicely@yahoo.com.

This is a collection of 80 haiku and six tanka by Elliot Nicely. The poems are organized by the following sections: Natura, Tempus, Deus, Mors, and Amor, which correspond to the following meanings/definitions: Nature, Time, God/Deity, Death, and Love.

Some of Nicely's haiku are observational scenes in Nature, such as: *wisps of fog / gathering morning light / a steelhead rises*, while others juxtapose human behavior with Nature: *neighborhood gossip / from blossom to blossom / honey bees*. There are city haiku in this book as well: *afternoon drizzle . . . / at the British Museum / a whale-bone chess set*. In this haiku, sight, smell, and sound create a strong atmosphere in the first line, while the next two lines are vivid images that contain significant emotional undertones as well as deep psychological and cultural implications. The following haiku aptly shows emotional and psychological power: *autumn migration / the pull of my son's hand / from mine*. We don't know the circumstances, but the emotional pull in this haiku is evident. This tanka also shows emotional vulnerability: *deep autumn / a bare maple / cradles the sunset / even now, the weight / of that word infertile*.

The subjects of religion and death appear in some haiku. The Mors section ends with this heart-wrenching haiku: *rain-soaked newspaper / no mention of our neighbor / lost to the war*. There is a mix of sensual poems, relationships struggles, and divorce poems in the last section, Amor. Here are two examples: (1) *summer solstice the distance to her lips*, and (2) *marriage counseling — / an unexpected wind shifts / the burn barrel smoke*.

An impressive list of publication credits shows Nicely's dedication to writing haiku and tanka. The subjects of his poems range from crisp nature observations to diverse human relationships that are raw and emotional. In short, he is a skilled poet and readers will appreciate the depth and variety in this full-length collection of poetry. This is a high-quality publication. I highly recommend it. ◻■

It Breaks Your Heart: Haiku and Senryu on the 2023 New York Mets by James Knippen and Daniel Shank Cruz (Redheaded Press, Alpharetta, GA: 2024). Edited by Jamie Wimberly. 80 pages, 5.5" x 8.5". Paperback, glossy interior pages. ISBN: 979-8-218-41884-7. \$20. Visit redheadedpress.com/contact to order. Also available as a free e-book at redheadedpress.com.

Ever since Cor van den Heuvel and Nanae Tamura edited *Baseball Haiku: The Best Haiku Ever Written about the Game* (which was published by W. W. Norton & Company in 2007), baseball moments found a new home in contemporary English-language haiku.

It Breaks Your Heart begins with a foreword by Jamie Wimberly, where he mentions, "Baseball, after all, represents a series of haiku moments in a long season, bringing us joy and grief in equal measure." The preface begins with a quote by former Major League Baseball Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti, "It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms into summer, filling afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall all alone." The preface goes on to describe how the two poets, Daniel Shank Cruz and James Knippen, relate to Major League Baseball and the Mets team with their history. Here is a sample of haiku and senryu from the book: (1) *roof closed / the field / haunted by ghosts*, (2) *mound meeting / the low roar / of an airplane*, (3) *over-the-wall catch — / a girl gazes into / her popcorn*, and (4) *Buck's last game the length of Francisco's hug*. In the preface, Cruz writes, "These poems inhabit a space between 'desk haiku' and traditional experiential haiku. They were written in the moment as a record of our emotional experiences of fandom, inspired by real events, but these events were observed from afar via television." This collection reminds us of how popular baseball is in America and how a single team has a significant impact on a city's economy and the emotional well-being of dedicated and passionate baseball fans. Even readers who are not fans of baseball will get a real glimpse into this world in this collection. ◻■

Two Summers: Haiku and Senryu by Bill Cooper (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024). 132 pages, 4.25" x 6.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-1-958408-37-7. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

This is a substantial collection of 160 haiku and senryu by Bill Cooper organized into four sections: (1) Child, (2) Water, (3) Land, and (4) Air. In the first section, readers will enjoy seeing life through the eyes of a child. Here are two examples: (1) *tread to tread / climbing grandpa's tractor tire / to pears*, and (2) *her search / for a horse that breathes / carousel*. There are mostly observational haiku in the Water section with fresh imagery, such as: *lifting off / with a nudge of a wave / young pelican*. This monoku also stood out: *fitting in a sip of ginger tea on mute*. In the Land section, there are some unexpected juxtapositions, such as: *indicted lawyer / a blueberry pancake / ripe for flipping*, though there are some observational, Nature-based haiku in this section as well: *sand castle ruins / a little egret across / sargassum*. In the Air section, these two haiku stood out: (1) *a small girl / sings to her leaf / crab nebula*, and (2) *a fleck of ash / comes and goes / garlic blossoms*. Overall, readers will enjoy the variety of subject matter in this book. This is an impressive collection to be savored. □■

Choking the Moon: Haiku and Senryu by Robert Letters (Paucus Press, Raleigh, NC: 2024). 137 pages, 5" x 7". Paperback. ISBN: 978-1733329569. \$12 from amazon.com

This is an extensive collection of 261 haiku and senryu organized into three sections: (1) Choking the Moon, (2) Fleeing the Cook, and (3) Not a Comb in His Pocket. The title is derived from this haiku: *wisteria / climbing the maple / choking the moon*. The back cover states: "This collection is true to the traditional Japanese form, yet pushes English language haiku and senryu into unexplored territory." Some of Robert Letter's haiku are imagistic scenes in Nature, such as: *willow moving / ripples / in the old pond*. Other haiku avoid juxtapositions, but capture moments in time, such as: *two new dogs / sniff / through the fence*. Other poems come across as a

phrase: *the way / brown grass / loves rain*. The majority of Letter's haiku are observational and Nature-based: *in the shadow of the pin / snow dust / on black grass*, though a few focus on modern life in the neighborhood: *empty bottles / in my neighbor's bin / Sunday morning*. This haiku shows a collision between civilization and Nature: *muddy hoof prints / on the asphalt greenway / a civilized horse*. There are some haiku that also contain strong juxtapositions, such as: *crumbling stone chimney / wisteria climbs / the walnut trees*, while a few highlight relationships: *on a bench / overlooking the lake / your leg over my leg*. The strongest haiku and senryu in this book avoid being read as three separate lines. While there are some poems that have room for improvement, and some poems seem to carry more resonance than others, there are some real gems to be found in this collection. □■

Weather by Rob Taylor (Gaspereau Press, Nova Scotia, Canada: 2024). 128 pages, 5" x 8.5". Trade paper, paperback. ISBN: 978-1554472635. \$25.95 from www.gaspereau.com.

In the afterword, Rob Taylor writes, "My father died when I was eleven and my life's work since then has been to become him." Taylor goes on to write, "I became a poet, I know, because I could not become—as he was—a minister." The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in Taylor finding refuge in the woods on Port Moody's Shoreline Trail, which wraps around the easternmost point of Burrard Inlet. Here, instead of writing sermons, he wrote haiku. There are a total of 177 haiku in this book, organized in three sections, with a mix of haiku, haiku sequences, and other short form poems. Taylor writes about his family and the wildlife of Burrard Inlet. He includes some city-based poems as well. Here is a sample of five haiku: (1) *mid-dream / my father's voice becomes / my daughter's cry*, (2) *catching my breath / as the bus approaches— / wild violets*, (3) *morning dew— / silver slowly vanishes / from the spider's eyes*, (4) *dusk— / the sun lingering / in my wedding ring*, and (5) *alone in the woods / pulling from my pocket / my daughter's mitten*. Some of Taylor's poems also reveal his inner thoughts, such as: *today's no waste / I've read two pages of the*

/ *very large novel*. Taylor's sense of humor appears in a few poems, however, his love for his family, the Burrard Inlet, and specifically his love for being a father takes precedence. In addition, a lot of care and attention went into the physical design and formatting of this book. In short, this collection offers authentic glimpses into Rob Taylor's life and observations. It is clear that he has found his voice in his poetry, which embodies a compassionate and sensitive tone. Readers will be inspired to see haiku as both a solitary activity and as an integral part of family and everyday life. As I turn the last page, I can see the blur of the poet's father looking back at his son with a great deal of love, respect, and admiration. A thoughtful and heartfelt collection. □■

REVIEWED BY CHERIE HUNTER DAY

Shine Shadow by Peter Yovu (Red Moon Press, Winchester, VA: 2024) 108 pages, 6" x 9" paperback, perfect softbound with full-color cover. ISBN: 978-1-958408-51-3. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

Shine Shadow is the latest full-length collection of poetry by Peter Yovu. It's a satisfying literary treat that offers haiku or haiku-like minimalist poems along with longer poems in the lyric, narrative, and mediative modes, short prose, and haibun. Over sixty percent of the poems are haiku or haiku-like, either single-line or three-line poems, some with expansive alignment. Presenting haiku alongside lineated poetry feels novel because there are so few instances where this has been done. *Shine Shadow* is exemplary in that the poems work so well together. As Philip Rowland notes in the preface: "when the integration of haiku with other kinds of poetry is done with nuanced care, as here, the effect is enriching, opening new avenues and perspectives for the reader."

Peter Yovu has published work in the leading haiku journals for over thirty-five years, and his style in this collection shows his range, from traditional/contemporary: