

The San Francisco Haiku Anthology: Volume 2 is certainly a must for fans of the original 1992 work, as well as anyone invested in studying and collecting the work of a particular region. If you're planning to attend the 2025 Haiku North America Conference in San Francisco this year and you're newer to haiku, this anthology is an excellent way to familiarize yourself with some of the poets you will likely meet. (I plan to bring my copy with me for the poets to sign.) But even if you are not focused on the Bay Area as a source of interest, or preparing for HNA, the poems in this anthology are of such high quality that I would recommend it to anyone. This is not a novelty gift book; the city of San Francisco is more of an implicit presence than an explicit one. You can enjoy and learn from these haiku no matter where you live. □■

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS KLACZANSKY

Memo to Warhol: A Collaboration of Art & Haiku in Color by Robert Epstein (haiku) and Ed Markowski (art). (Self-published: 2023). 135 pages, softcover. ISBN: 979-8862017885. \$18 from Amazon.com.

As a fan of Warhol's, my interest in this collection was immediately captured. I see the comparison between the art of Markowski and Warhol: both are bright and colorful, but Markowski leans more toward the abstract. The links between the art and poems are clear yet subtle. I was disappointed, though, that some of the images of the art in the book are pixelated and not sharp. Perhaps this was the intention of the artist as an aesthetic, but I am not sure.

I found many of the haiku personable, witty, and inventive. An illustration of a haiku that encompasses these three qualities is this one:

bronc buster —
sliding off the storyline
I wake up

Another haiku with a double meaning and which also relates to the theme of the book:

forced to move
I search for an exit
in the wall art

Some of the haiku hint at colors, and also the connection between humanity and nature:

floating
in his margarita
what's left of the sun

Humor is evident in many of the poems as well, with a touch of poignancy:

christmas requires some assembly

At times, the poet exposes personal struggles and his psychological successes resulting from them:

25 years sober —
Amber's still
My favorite color

In this example, I am uncertain why the poet used capitalization but it could be representative of his earlier work or another style.

On occasion, the poet also offers a unique perspective on mortality:

field & forest —
my late mother will be back
in 5 billion years

Sometimes, though, the poems veer into the didactic:

siesta —
when all else fails
be sure to take one

Or, the haiku seem to be leaning towards a motivational message:

homage to Monet —
I won't let my inner landscape
crust over

And, on occasion, the poems center on themes that could be characterized as generic:

desert rose —
sometimes beauty is right
underfoot

Overall, *Memo to Warhol: A Collaboration of Art & Haiku in Color* is an entertaining and intriguing homage to a legendary artist. In my opinion, there are a few moments where the poems could be more subtle or nuanced, and the art could perhaps be better displayed. Still, if you are a fan of Warhol and Robert Epstein's haiku, you will find food for thought while also exploring a range of emotions and sentiments. ■

REVIEWED BY DANIEL SHANK CRUZ

Two Seasons in Israel: A Selection of Peace and War Haiku by Rick Black (Turtle Light Press, Arlington, VA: 2024). 139 pages, softcover. ISBN: . 978-0-9748147-7-3. \$16.95 from turtlelightpress.com.

Two Seasons in Israel is an expanded version of Black's 2007 chapbook, *Peace and War: A Collection of Haiku from Israel*. Black,

who lived in Israel for six years working as a journalist, decided the expansion was necessary as a response to the events of October 7, 2023, and their aftermath. Black writes that when putting together the collection “I realized that the poems were divided between two seasons: peace and war” (ix), hence the book’s title. The collection contains around 200 haiku/senryu, with seventeen black-and-white photographs interspersed throughout. It also includes a glossary of terms from the poems that is a helpful accessibility tool, showing that Black is genuine in his wish that the book will help readers learn about the conflict.

Two Seasons does not shy away from portraying the ravages of violence:

one-legged vet
the ricochet of dice
by his espresso

just buried soldier—
too soon for his mother
to notice the crocus

Throughout the collection, there is a sense of weariness about how long the violence has lasted alongside a sense of hope that peace will prevail and the strife will become only a memory:

highway's edge
old armored vehicles rust
beneath cypress trees

an armored tank
completely surrounded
queen anne's lace

The collection frequently uses children as a symbol of this hope and resilience:

Muslim Quarter:
boys keep playing soccer

despite the gunshots

Hasidic boys
slide down the bomb shelter—
its slippery roof

In one poem that sounds like something Bashō might have written on his wanderings, we are reminded that peace is something achieved not just between humans, but also between humans and the environment:

sign posted
at the Latrun monastery:
“Don’t hurt the flowers!”

These last five poems epitomize one half of the collection’s thought-provoking subtitle. I know what a “war haiku” is, but “peace haiku” is an under-utilized genre that deserves more practitioners. Black successfully writes about such a divisive conflict because he rejects the binary of Israeli/Palestinian to focus instead on that between war and peace, making it clear that the haiku way is on the side of peace. The book declares this without being preachy. I hope that more haijin begin using “peace haiku” as a form for their work. As good as Two Seasons’ poems are, this concept may be its most important contribution to English-language haiku.

A few poems are too direct to work as haiku or senryu. Here are two examples that also show Black’s tendency to overuse dashes as kireji:

luggage repair—
if only our broken hearts
could be mended

plowshares, indeed

will we ever stop
waging war?

However, overall *Two Seasons in Israel* is well worth reading. It does an excellent job examining its specific subject matter while also offering a powerful general example of how to successfully write politically-inspired haiku. □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JOSHUA GAGE

magnolia diary by paul m. (Modern Haiku Press, Champaign, IL, USA: 2024). 90 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-0-9600855-8-3. \$12 +S&H directly from the publisher at <https://www.modernhaiku.org/mhbooks/Miller-MagnoliaDiary.html>.

magnolia diary contains over one hundred haiku and senryu focusing on themes of aging, memory, and loneliness. paul m is an accomplished haiku poet, and these haiku resonate with each other to create a beautiful chorus of poetry. Sample poems: young fiddleheads--/unpacking lunchtime's/NSAID; dining alone/the water glass/arrives with lipstick. This book is strongly recommended to and belongs on the shelf of any reader interested in contemporary English Language Haiku and poetry. □■

How Do You Haiku? A step-by-step guide with templates by Danna Smith (Plumbago Press, Woodbridge, CA, USA: 2023). 106 pages, perfect softbound (additional formats available). ISBN: 978-8-9887378-1-0. \$19 from Amazon.com

How Do You Haiku? by Danna Smith is guide to haiku and related forms for tweens. This book aims to teach tweens the basics of haiku history and writing, seeking a balance between playfully encouraging and educational. Older grade school and younger tweens are the clear target audience, from the use of simplistic fonts as well as comic graphics. The book is directed towards them,

but would easily find itself at home in a classroom library. There are “haiku templates” included which readers are encouraged to photocopy and share, so teachers and youth librarians would also find this helpful. While some readers might find Smith’s presentation of haiku to be surface level and overly simplistic, the target audience needs that sort of language. The examples, too, some readers might question, but Smith has made an attempt to balance known contemporary children’s haiku authors and known English Language Haiku authors and translators in an attempt to bridge between what the target audience knows and the possible direction they can pursue as they grow in their haiku journey.

Smith begins by providing an invitation to readers, encouraging them to open themselves to poetry, particularly haiku. Further chapters explore basic guidelines and definitions of haiku, senryu, and related forms and crafts. Smith explores basic composition techniques, with particular emphasis on sensory imagery and kigo. She later explores ways readers can share their haiku and learn more about haiku, including dedicating a few pages to haiku masters and recommended reading. The pages are generously illustrated with playful choices, and Smith’s presentation of haiku, while possibly simplistic, is more accurate than other children’s guides and should be encouraged.

How Do You Haiku? by Dana Smith isn’t necessarily something readers of *Frogpond* would want to read unless they are true collectors of all things haiku, but that is only because our audience and Smith’s audience are too disparate. However, readers who know any older grade school students or younger tweens are strongly encouraged to buy this book for them, and to explore it with them, sharing their knowledge. This book is strongly recommended for tweens and their parents, as well as any educators, youth librarians, and volunteers. Furthermore, this book is so moderately priced that youth writing groups or similar organizations could organize a class based around this text and not break the budget.

BREIFLY REVIEWED BY ALLYSON WHIPPLE

Dry Grass: Tanka by Robert Letters (Paucus Press, City, Country: 2024). 137 pages, softcover, ISBN: ISBN: 978-1-7333295-8-3 . \$12 from Amazon.com.

Dry Grass is a collection of 362 tanka (yes, I numbered them all just to be sure) largely focused on experiences in the outside world (both the wild and the human-made), while occasionally touching on the inner world of dreams and feelings, as well as the broader topics of religion, philosophy, and art. There are a number of masterful tanka in this collection, both from those that take the sketch-from-life approach and those that address more abstract ideas. For example, I am particularly fond of the moment in tanka 107, which is an excellent sketch from life:

deer tracks
in the snow
shoveling the driveway
eventually
I look up

I am equally fond of tanka 307, which has a religious bent:

fire in the attic
where we store everything
we need
your crown of thorns—
where did we hide it?

On the whole, I appreciate the creative range of this collection. However, it feels about twice as long as it needs to be, with a number of poems feeling like different drafts of each other placed side by side. For example, there are four tanka that could be the title poem, #254, and then #360, #361, and #362. 254 and 306 ask “do you remember / the endless night in dry grass” and “do you remember / the dry grass,” while 361 and 362 reference “barefoot in

dry grass” and “bare feet / in dry grass” (all quotations attributed respectively). The repetition of terms and phrasing is confusing and creates the feeling that these are more related drafts than individual poems. Nor is this the only example of repeated topics and phrasing, and these similar poems are all placed close together, further contributing to the sense that Robert Letters could have been more selective in the poems he included in this manuscript. Ultimately, though, the similarity could work as an effective teaching tool. I found myself putting serious thought into which similar versions of each tanka worked for me, and why. I think that tanka devotees could use this book as a source of reflection about their own poetic preferences.

Infinity Strings by Hifsa Ashraf and R.C. Thomas (Infinity Books: 2025). 79 pages, softcover. ISBN: 978-1-3999-9308-1. £9.99 GBP (\$13.11 USD) from <https://rcthomasthings.bigcartel.com/> or Amazon.com.

Infinity Strings is a collection of speculative tan-renga by Hifsa Ashraf and R.C. Thomas. These five-line poems connect cosmic themes with the Earthbound technological landscape to show the ways in which science fiction is both increasingly becoming reality, while occasionally raising concerns about whether the world we inhabit is good for us.

Although I’m personally not a fan of the speculative genre, these poems are skillful enough to win over someone who is not the target audience. I appreciate the ways in which Hifsa and R.C. address the awe of the cosmos with the mundane reality of screens and software subscriptions. While not truly optimistic, they also do not dwell in a dour view of humanity’s future, for there is always some aspect of this planet or the broader cosmos to inspire us.

*new subscriber
what follows
is emptiness*

VPN proxy
fixing narratives

*

dolphin chronotype
I surf
at high tide

ASMR
page click by page click

Hifsa and R.C. are excellent haijin in their own right, and when their talents combine, the results are powerful. I didn't see a superfluous poem in this entire collection; in fact, when I reached the end, I found myself wishing for more. In addition to excellent writing, they keep the text organized and easy to read by always having Hifsa's lines appear in standard texts, and R.C.'s in italics. And yes, there are probably words in this collection that you're going to have to look up, but I encourage you to make the effort so you can fully appreciate these tan-renga.

Infinity Strings is a must-have for any fan of scifi-ku, but I also encourage those who are not fans of speculative work to give this book a try. It might just make a convert out of you.

Shining Wind edited by A.A. Marcoff et. al. (The British Haiku Society: 2024). 157 pages, softcover. ISBN: 978-1-906333-21-8. £6.00 GBP (approximately \$9.00 USD). To purchase, email bhsbookshop@speedpost.net.

Shining Wind is a bilingual, international anthology focused on the topic of light and its potential to unify humanity. All aspects of this book—right down to the front matter—appear in both Bulgarian and English. Featuring 139 poets from four continents,

this anthology is an editorial triumph.

What most impressed me about *Shining Wind* is the multitude of ways the poets convey light, both explicit and implicit. In addition, while certain words (i.e. sunrise, moonlight) are understandably repeated throughout the book, no specific denotation of light feels repetitive or overused. What's notably impressive is that no light-related term is repeated twice in a row. Considering that this anthology is organized in alphabetical order by poets' first names, that shows truly careful consideration by the editorial staff.

winter dawn
the cat climbs out
of his silhouette

Barry George

shining wind
among the maritime pines
glimpses of sky

Daniella Misso

My only quibble with this anthology is superficial: I found the text used for the poets' names and locations difficult to read at times. As I like to be able to research new-to-me poets I find in these anthologies, struggling to parse the font caused some hiccups. But aesthetics are less important than content, and the haiku in this collection shine (pun intended). A must-have for Bulgarian haikin, *Shining Wind* is an excellent themed anthology suitable for any bookshelf or library. □■