

Book Reviews

Reviewed by Nicholas Klacsanzky

Haiku 21.2: an anthology of contemporary English-language haiku, ed. Lee Gurga & Scott Metz 282 pages, perfect softbound. ISBN: 978-0-9600855-9-0. Champaign, IL: Modern Haiku Press, 2024. \$25 at www.modernhaiku.org.

The anthology Haiku 21 was a pivotal release for the English-language haiku community and won the “Best Anthology” award from the Haiku Society of America and the Haiku Foundation Touchstone Award. So I came to Haiku 21.2 with high expectations for its purview of the years 2011 to 2020. To get to the point, I was not disappointed and was consistently surprised by the variety of ideas, feelings, and styles presented in this new volume. In a way, I enjoy this newer volume more, for several reasons.

Haiku 21 focused on haiku written from 2000 to 2010 in the English language and, in the words of Hiroaki Sato, “reveals a shift in haiku writing in English today. Along with typically haikuesque sensibilities come fleeting remarks, cosmic wonders, whimsies, dissonances, gritty and elegant meldings with nature, veritable koans.” Haiku 21.2, on the other hand, seems to present more of a spectrum of styles and visions of haiku, rather than a focus on mostly the experimental. Another aspect to consider is that the previous volume contained over 600 haiku by more than 200 poets, whereas this volume features over 800 haiku by more than 400 poets. Both books are sizable, but Haiku 21.2 features

double the number of poets and is more of an overview of what is happening nowadays in the English-language haiku world.

Besides the plethora of unique haiku, *Haiku 21.2* also has a medium-length introduction that is insightful, and an appendix that includes the introduction to *Haiku 2015*, the write-up “Haiku Constellations” from *Haiku 2020* by Richard Gilbert, and the introduction to *Haiku 2021*—all of which are worth the read (especially Gilbert’s, in my opinion).

Below, I will dive into some poems from *Haiku 21.2* that I found extremely resonant:

in his buttonhole our forgotten war

Fay Aoyagi

This haiku expands from the small to the large, and the mundane to the abstract, with masterful brevity, sound choice, and layered phrasing.

winter orange
an unborn at the end
of a scalpel

Don Baird

The imagery, diction, and turn in the second line create a poignant vision for the reader to respond to.

his ego death
on ayahuasca
on instagram

Warren Decker

The ironic humor shines through this technologically themed haiku.

snow from Xmas still painted on the porno shop

Chris Gordon

The mix of purity and impurity, impermanence and permanence, and comical imagery makes this a relatable haiku.

picking up his touch
where he left it
spring breeze

Jennifer Hambrick

A perfect combination of humanity and nature that hints at passion, innocence, and innateness.

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out of the fog
pink pussy hats

Deb Koen

Each part of this concrete haiku is a surprise. Fine use of diction, imagery, and allusion.

prolonged night her nipples eclipses

Malintha Perera

The sense of sound and imagery in this haiku is striking, bringing the reader to an alternate dimension.

piano music
from an overturned car—

snow falling

Chad Lee Robinson

An original juxtaposition that features beauty during a tragic scene.

starlight
through my body
of metaphors

Michelle Tennison

A classic haiku turn among more avant-garde imagery.

There were many other haiku I was excited to comment on from this collection (especially more concrete haiku), but I will leave the rest for you all to discover.

Ultimately, I recommend picking up a copy of Haiku 21.2, as it builds on and perhaps improves in demonstrating the scope of what is possible in English-language haiku.