
REVIEWS

Moon Woke Me Up Nine Times: Selected Haiku of Basho, David Young, trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013). 106 pages; 20 cm; 5¼"x8". Semigloss black card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-307962-00-3. Price: \$17.00 from booksellers.

Reviewed by Charles Trumbull

Every time a book of new translations of Bashō comes out, I have to wonder why. Do we really need another torte made from those old chestnuts? In this case, though, I think the answer is yes. These versions by David Young really do add something new to the corpus of Bashō translations that we already have.

This is the first time Young has taken on Japanese verse, but he is a well-established translator of other world literatures, notably the Chinese poets but more recently the Italians Petrarch and Eugenio Montale. He is an emeritus professor of English and creative writing at Oberlin College and has eleven books of his own poetry in print. Preparing for his book of Bashō's haiku, Young read all the standard translations, and the bibliography in *Moon Woke Me Up Nine Times* lists works by Aitken, Barnhill, Blyth, Corman, Hamill, Hass, Mayhew, Stryk, and Ueda. Young says he learned the most, however, from Jane Reichhold's *Bashō: The Complete Haiku* (2008), so much so that he includes a key for those who want to compare his translations with Reichhold's.

What distinguishes Young's versions is their lack of fussiness, straightforward simplicity, and attention to the lyricism of Bashō's work. A poet himself, Young's renderings should be read for their poetry. Taking Young's own suggestion, let's compare a few of his translations (on the left in the examples below) with some others in the translational canon.

Young's version of Bashō's "crow" haiku impresses precisely because it says it all, and simply:

Crow perched
on a bare branch
autumn evening

on a bare branch
a crow has alighted ...
autumn nightfall

Makoto Ueda's translation (*Basho & His Interpreters*, 1992) preserves the order of the images in the original Japanese but inverts the normal English word order to do so. Young's version forgoes any sense of motion ("alighting") or passage of time ("nightfall"), resulting in a quiet, settled feeling.

Translations of the Japanese adjective *omoshiroki* that Bashō uses in another haiku to qualify a day when Fuji is invisible because of the misty rain are all over the map. "Good," "interesting," "happy," "peaceful," "pleasant," "intriguing," "more attractive," "more beautiful," "lovelier still," and "quiet gladness," are the suggestions of various translators. Young approaches this haiku with a modern flair reminiscent of Cid Corman or one of the Beats (though none of these translated this haiku to my knowledge). Compare Young's forward version with the padded-up wordiness of Sam Hamill (*Sound of Water*, 1995):

Too much mist
can't see Fuji
—makes it more interesting

Chilling autumn rains
curtain Mount Fuji, then make it
more beautiful to see

Young's translations are normally brief and unfussy, in the colloquial style of Corman and the Zen laconism of Stryk (*On Love and Barley*, 1985). In Bashō's "call of the duck" haiku, for example, he finds no need to include information that other translators do, such as the fact this is a wild duck and that the sea is, or has been, darkening. Young may reach too far, however—adding too much, well, color—in using "duck's squawk" rather than the more common "duck's call" or "duck's voice" for *kamo no koe*:

The sea dark
the duck's squawk
dimly white

Darkening waves—
cry of wild ducks,
faintly white

In a few cases Young wanders off by himself and gets into trouble. For example, I have always understood Bashō's "octopus" haiku to refer to the Japanese method of trapping these creatures in a clay pot suspended underwater on a cord. Young's locution "octopus in a jar" sounds to me like it is pickled or preserved. Like most translators, Young leaves it unclear whether it is the poet or the octopus who is doing the dreaming. Peter Beilenson (*Cherry Blossoms*, 1960), for one, was sure it was the octopus:

Octopus in a jar	Pot-imprisoned now
briefer dreams	Palely dreaming octopus
summer moon	In summer moonlight

Young shows his indebtedness to Reichhold in his rendering of the "old pond" haiku:

Old pond	old pond
frog leaps	a frog jumps into
into the splash	the sound of water

I have always been troubled by Reichhold's radical reading in which the frog jumps into the *sound* of the water, not into the water itself—no other translator to my knowledge does it this way, so I'm troubled too that Young should follow her.

For one last example of Young's artistry, I'll choose Bashō's "summer grass" haiku and compare the poetry of his translation with that of three other poets turned translators. "Summer grass" is a tough nut to render smoothly into English. One poet, Cid Corman, tried at least three times but inevitably got tangled up in all the thorny and cacophonous possessives:

summer grass
relics of
warriors' dreams

Cool Melon, 1959

summer grass
warriors
dreams' ruins

Back Roads to Far Towns,
with Susumu Kamaike, 1968

the summer grasses
the mightiest warriors'
dreams' consequences

One Man's Moon, 1984

Hamill (*Little Book of Haiku*, 1995) felt he needed to insert the word “imperial,” unnecessarily (and wrongly, insofar as any imperialism is not the soldiers' but their masters’):

Summer grasses:
all that remains of great soldiers'
imperial dreams

Of all the poet/translators, Robert Hass (*The Essential Haiku*, 1994) seems most straightforwardly to have captured the elusive meaning:

Summer grass —
all that's left
of warriors' dreams.

Young ignores the niceties of haiku form, eschews possessives (how do you feel about “soldier dreams” rather than “soldiers”?), and reaches for the poetry within:

Battlefield, now summer grass
all that's left of
soldier dreams

Moon Woke Me Up Nine Times is definitely worth your attention. You may well discover some new favorite translations of Master Bashō's chestnuts.

Favor of Crows: New and Collected Haiku, by Gerald Vizenor (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2014). 127 pages; 5¼" x 8¼". Hardbound: matte tan paper-covered boards quarterbound in buckram; semigloss four-color covers; black section dividers. ISBN 978-0-819574-32-9 hardcover; 978-0-819574-33-6 e-book. Price: \$24.95 hardcover; \$19.99 e-book, from booksellers.

Reviewed by Charles Trumbull

The name Gerald Vizenor is rarely encountered in haiku journals and anthologies, yet his manifold activities in and around the haiku genre belie his anonymity in the community. He learned about haiku as a U.S. soldier stationed in Hokkaido and Sendai, Japan, in the early 1950s and began publishing his original haiku a decade later. To his inaugural work, the 1962 chapbook *Two Wings the Butterfly*, he has since added six more published collections of haiku, most recently *Cranes Arise: Haiku Scenes* (Nodin Press, 1999). Vizenor is a member of the Minnesota Chippewa (Anishinaabe) nation, and lived on the White Earth Reservation near Bemidji, Minn. In the 1960s he worked as a correction officer in a reformatory and was director of the American Indian Employment and Guidance Center in Minneapolis. His main vocations have been scholar and professor in Native American studies at the state universities in Minnesota, Oklahoma, California (Berkeley and Santa Cruz), and New Mexico, as well as journalist, author, and translator. A key area of Vizenor's scholarly and social inquiry has been, to use the term that he resuscitated for use in Native American studies, *survivance*, which he explains in his book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* is "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry."

Vizenor's work in literary criticism has examined Native American dream songs and trickster stories in relation to *survivance*. Later he explored the perceived relationship between Japanese and Native American short-form lyrics in "Haiku Culturalism," his keynote address at

Haiku North America 1999 in Evanston, Ill. (published as “Fusions of Survivance: Haiku Scenes and Native Dream Songs” in *MH* 31.1).

Favor of Crows collects fifty years of Vizenor’s haiku in a handsomely produced hardback book from a major academic publisher of poetry. A few of Vizenor’s haiku in this collection touch directly on survivance and several more on Native American themes, though he is never heavy-handed in doing so:

grand marais
old fur traders tease the fire
survivance stories

lake itasca
source of the great river
buried in snow

For the most part though, Vizenor’s work is heavily weighted toward nature haiku in the *shasei* mode. His is very much a haiku of place. His locales are the field and forest—occasionally a rural setting—his subjects the creatures that live there. Perhaps more than would be the case for a non-Indian poet, however, Vizenor’s animals and even inanimate things have souls and human attributes and emotions:

old gray stump
remembers the past today
raising the moon vines

blue herons
tease bashō in the shallows
spring waders

early morning
steady beat of a woodpecker
breakfast poetry

There is a certain thematic poverty in this book, however. Subjects such as that poetic woodpecker, the dancing sunset beams and sandhill cranes, or the storytelling wolves, as in

timber wolves
raise their voices overnight
trickster stories

recur too often. Bouncing things—red sumac, gray squirrels, shiny ravens, and cocky crows—occur four times in ten pages (108–117).

Then again, Vizenor frequently misses an opportunity to wring additional meaning from his images. In this haiku, for example,

mosquitoes
swarm outside the tent
late night chorus

he has settled for an intellectualized line 3 that simply interprets for the reader the content of lines 1 and 2. Similarly, a number of haiku in *Favor of Crows* present what seems to be three separate images that together may produce a fine mood but exhibit little tension, development, or action; for example:

gentle rain
cat asleep on the front porch
doves in the eaves

Haiku after haiku in this collection is constructed in a format with two subjects [images] divided by a phrase beginning with an active verb, e.g.:

rain clouds
float in a great convoy
birds in the reeds

The repetition of this style becomes deadening after several pages. These recurring weaknesses suggest that greater selectivity and closer editing would have been a good idea.

Quibbles notwithstanding, *Favor of Crows* is a fine monument to one of America's pioneer haikuists, an autodidact poet who has been laboring, mostly outside the haiku "mainstream," for more than fifty years. Gerald Vizenor has surely inspired survivance haiku from the pens of such Native American luminaries as William Oandasan, Mary TallMountain, N. Scott Momaday, and Sherman Alexie.

Drifting, by Marco Fraticelli. (Canada: Catkin Press, 2013). 88 pages; 5"x7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound, ISBN 978-0-9880784-4-4, Price: US\$10.00 plus postage. Inquire of the publisher at claudiaradmore@gmail.com or the author at kingsroadpress@hotmail.com

Reviewed by Roberta Beary

Treasure found is perhaps what haiku poet Marco Fraticelli thought when he first discovered the eight diaries of Celesta Taylor in an abandoned cabin near Quebec. Combining his haiku with the excerpts from the diaries, written between 1905 and 1916, Fraticelli has crafted a poetic hybrid of a woman's midlife musings and his responses to them.

Drifting is a true page-turner, bringing together a May–December romance (which may be one-sided) and the darker element of incest. In the author's Introduction one learns, "Celesta was hired as a housekeeper by her first cousin, Henry Miles. Henry was himself a widower with two teenage sons ... (and) was the father of a newborn baby, Evelyn, who was born out of wedlock with his fifteen year old niece, Clara Miles, whom Henry had engaged as a housekeeper." But wait, there's more: "At the time of the first journal, 1905, Celesta was 45 and Henry 32." Henry also is a man of God, a Seventh-day Adventist now on the wrong side of his church elders. Although Celesta does write in her diary about Henry's

treatment by the church, she is silent on Henry's relationship with Clara and their child Evelyn.

Fratlicelli resists the temptation of viewing the diaries from a 21st century perspective. But some things have not changed much since 1905, as is apparent from the first three diary entries, each marked with a large X and each dated almost exactly one month apart. These Xs are Celesta's code for her menstrual cycle. The third entry, dated December 7, 1905, reads, "X Mill caught fire." The haiku for that date echoes the fire image foreshadowing what's in store in a few years for Celesta, then age 45:

I sprinkle ashes
from the woodstove
onto the compost pile

The following month there is another X and another fire. The January 9, 1906, entry reads "X Commenced a big tub of butter. Davis house burned."

Fratlicelli directly references the X only once in his haiku. Ironically it is to mark the absence of Celesta's menstruation—a harbinger of the beginning of menopause. On July 30, 1906, Celesta writes "Henry went to the sanatorium. Got there just in time to save his life." The haiku for that date is

no rain again
the X
in this month's calendar

There is no X again until September 23, 1909. On September 24, 1909, Celesta writes, "Sad. My head very bad" and two days later, "I have been so sad all day. Sewed some but felt so bad I could not do much." On October 5, 1909, she notes, "I sewed all day. General work. More cheerful for no reason." While Celesta does not seem aware of the cause of the changes in her physical and mental state, the haiku in response to this entry expresses the poet's greater understanding

a butterfly
settles
on one of my weeds

The diary entries describe a life filled with hard housekeeping tasks and illness. Henry grows more and more upset with his treatment by the church elders, yet his daughter/grandniece Evelyn continues to live under his care and protection. He never appears to make the connection between his life choices and his ouster from the church. Meanwhile Celesta's midlife symptoms continue. Under the date July 11, 1911, she writes, "X' the first for nearly two years. I have breathed too much turpentine is the reason why."

I do not know if the term perimenopause existed in the early 20th century, but today if you enter perimenopause symptoms on Google, you will get more than 1 million results. *Drifting* gives the reader an accurate first-person perspective on the condition.

But *Drifting* encompasses more than the journey from perimenopause to menopause or another tale of unrequited love. Fraticelli's haiku get to the heart of the tangled family relationship between Celesta and Henry, thirteen years younger. Just three days after the July 11, 2011 entry, we read this haiku

breathing
watching him
breathing

As Celesta reaches her 50s, Henry meets a much younger woman. In October 20, 1915, Celesta writes, "I look like death and have failed ever since I got his first letter about that girl." The response haiku

the leaves are gone
and half the moon too
but I am still here

conveys just the right feeling of human frailty.

Ironically Celesta does not realize the relationship she seeks with her cousin Henry mirrors his with niece Clara. Nor is this indicated in any of the response haiku.

Overall Marco Fraticelli's pairing of his high-quality haiku and Celesta Taylor's diary entries is both sensitive and successful. Highly recommended.

(d)ark, by John Stevenson (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2014). 74 pages; 5¼" x 7¾". Glossy color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-27-0. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Paul Miller

Stevenson is well known to the haiku community: an award-winning poet, past president of the Haiku Society of America, past editor of its journal *Frogpond*, current managing editor of *The Heron's Nest*, and member of the Route 9 haiku group, among other things. His fifth collection *(d)ark* contains a nice mix of haiku, senryu, and tanka.

I have always thought of Stevenson as a poet who is interested in what it means to be a person (or persona) in your own skin. One of my favorite poems of his is the title poem to his 1999 collection *Some of the Silence*: "a deep gorge... / some of the silence / is me." This sense of personhood is a theme he has mined successfully through later collections. His newest collection continues that journey. Three examples:

my house
without me
autumn wind

maybe an ant
next time
maybe this time

a man in a crowd in a man

The last poem is especially appealing and seems to me the flipside of “deep gorge” in which (I believe) the poet also contains his own gorge. In “a man” the poet moves from the individual, to the mass, to the mass within the individual. Stevenson has filled in that gorge and now must reckon with the landfill.

Stevenson is also curious about his place in that “crowd” and I find his sketches of “others” often obliquely include himself (there but for the grace of god goes he ...), and as such, his observations are often tender. This is perhaps due to his involvement in Playback Theater in which the actors inhabit the stories of audience members. It has sensitized him to the viewpoint of others.

the memory
of his memory
cherry blossoms

never touching
his own face
tyrannosaurus

Stevenson has always been a bit of a wise cracker so it is not surprising that other observational musings are more traditionally senryu.

mansion tour
big mirrors
of the rich

as I always say spontaneity

A reader soon discovers that Stevenson’s poems contain a fair amount of humor, even when they appear to cover the darkest of human failings.

outside
the cinema
a line
of people waiting
to be shot

Like the “ark” in “dark,” even the darkest poems often have a sly wink. Finding the small pun in the last line makes the cinema poem bearable. I do not suggest that Stevenson attempts to minimize the shooting in

Colorado—which it seems likely he is referencing—but that he has found a method to cope.

In the introduction to the collection, Scott Metz suggests that the “ark” in the title can be taken “in various ways: the ark as symbol of body, mind, and psyche; the ark as poem; and the ark as a collection of poems.” It is a “story about survival, endurance, and overcoming the flood.” Stevenson, through his own humanity, is an optimist. I would add that it is this optimism that is the sp(ark) in the (d)arkness; his small acts of creation such as these poems.

This creation extends to other wonderful haiku that have a classic feel.

Ash Wednesday
snow drifts
over the river

four people
picket for peace
midwinter snow

And he includes a few that are playful in their use of language, yet because of his own humor are not out of place.

Maker of wolves
and clouds that
look like lambs

daylight as the exception it is

But what about those lines bordering the poems top and bottom? Every poem in the collection is contained by a pair. Thematically they could be considered enclosures for the poems, the way animals would have been penned on the biblical ark. However I find their consistent usage throughout the collection risky. For readers of haiku used to the white space that normally surrounds a poem they can feel claustrophobic. If they were used sparingly (I’m thinking of the cinema or a man in a crowd haiku) they could be an effective way to impart emotion at a non-language level. This would also be true in the cases where the text is longer than the lines, where the action is literally bursting out of the scene. This adds a sense of energy to some poems, but on the whole the lines feel random and a bit gimmicky since they are used across the board. However, their use is not materially detrimental to the collection, and

quickly becomes something like the color of the ink or the typeface—something seen but in most cases not given much thought too.

Like all good poets Stevenson has more than one trick up his sleeve. *(d)ark* is a satisfying collection and well worth picking up.

spring in the lobby
let's not wait
for the elevator

BRIEFLY NOTED

Chispas de Pedernal, by Diente de León (Medellín, Colombia: Mi Libro, 2014). 118 unnumbered pages; 15 cm; 6"x6". Hardbound; green hand-made paper-covered boards, embossed with color label; Smythe-sewn. No ISBN. No price given; inquire from edicionesmilibro@gmail.com.

This collection of 223 haiku from Diente de León (Juan Felipe Jaramillo), the organizer of the WHA conference in Medellín, Colombia, in September 2013, presents an important new voice in Latin American haiku. The book is divided into several thematic sections: "Life in the Temple," "Like the Sea, This Love That Comes and Goes," etc., each prefaced by a short meditation on nature, humans, and poetry. A sample from the section "Fleeting Time" with Charles Trumbull's translation: *Brisa mensajera— / de la amada difunta, / el olor de la tierra.* messenger breeze— / from the dead lover / the scent of the earth.