

BRIEFLY NOTED

Briefly in Spring, by Judith E.P. Johnson (Australia: Ginninderra Press, 2020). 62 pages; 5" × 7". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-76041-919-6. Price: \$10.89 paperback, \$3.00 Kindle from online booksellers.

This seventh chapbook by the Tasmanian haiku poet Judith E.P. Johnson includes some 136 mostly "new and unpublished" haiku and senryu. A blurb on the back of the chapbook suggests they have a "down-to-earth flavour reminiscent of Issa." That they do, often employing direct address, rhetorical questions, and childlike expressions of wonder to nice effect. A few poems may tend to over-explanation; some may fall back on expected juxtapositions; and the crowding of four to eight on a page may tend to diminish their singular impact. But many more acutely plumb the depths of experience. All-in-all, a candid and affecting look at the life of a grandmother, a neighbor, a traveler, a friend. *on her husband's grave / who from / the red rose?; waiting / for my hair to curl / salon gossip; crescent moon / a gravel road / follows the curve of the bay.* —mrb

Pandemic Haiku: Living Through Covid-19, by Robert Epstein (West Union, W.V.: Middle Island Press, 2020). 89 pages; 5" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7341254-7-4. Price: \$10.00 from online booksellers.

What to make of Epstein's new book of haiku on the theme of COVID-19 and the upheavals it has caused in our lives? More than eighty poems certainly focus on this ongoing circumstance, yet they do so in a way that seems less haiku than haikai, as literary historian Adam L. Kern explores it in his 2018 *The Penguin Book of Haiku* (reviewed here in issue 50.1). Kern likens the composition of premodern haikai to jazz improvisation or verbal riff. So, too, it seems, Epstein's pandemic haiku, which read like spontaneous, unfiltered repartee. There is plenty of wit and ire, but little ambiguity or suggestive space. That said, pandemic haiku of any

sort would seem a necessary record—and antidote—for our times. *media overload / she turns back / to her cereal box; quaking aspen / I don't want to die / on a ventilator; sheltering in place — / a local woodpecker / brings us together.* —mrb

The Helping Hand Haiku Anthology, ed. Robert Epstein (West Union, W.V.: Middle Island Press, 2020). 256 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-691997-80-8. Price: \$19.00 from online booksellers.

A noted anthologizer of haiku, Epstein also offers us this edited collection of poems by other poets relevant to the current pandemic. Compiled during the first year of COVID-19, *The Helping Hand* shares concerns with anthologies such as Scott Mason's *Gratitude* (reviewed in this issue), though Epstein hopes the selected haiku also speak in a larger way to the transpersonal "love ... behind every act of help, care and kindness." More than 950 haiku, arranged alphabetically, have been culled from haiku journals and responses to Epstein's call for submissions from poets around the world: *the baby feeds me / leaves from the cherry tree / summer dusk* (John Barlow); *at the thrift shop / a young man tries on / my father's shoes* (Charlotte Digregorio); *holding my umbrella / for the gnat too / tulip morning* (Cyndi Lloyd). —mrb

Rusty Backstop, by Michael Ketchek (Windsor, Conn.: Bottle Rockets Press, 2020). 12 pages; 2¾" × 4". Matte blue card covers; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. Price: \$3.50 from Bottle Rockets Press, P.O. Box 189, Windsor, CT 06095.

Nine haiku and senryu on no one theme from the most recent editor of *Frogpond*. A lively mix of sports poems, social commentary, and politics—what we've come to expect from Ketchek. An enjoyable read. *rusty backstop / the abandoned infield / turning green; Anne Frank's diary / would you hide an Arab / in your attic?* —pm

Legacy: Thirty Years of Haiku, by William Scott Galasso (Laguna Woods, Calif.: Galwin Press, 2020). 163 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7327527-2-6. Price: \$14.95 from on-line booksellers.

Yet another book in Galasso's retrospective look at many decades of writing haiku and related forms. Over 600 poems, eight per spread, take us through a lifetime of seasons, both natural and emotional. Admirers of the poet's work will want to pore through the pages for his gems: *April showers— / the cursive flow / of pen on paper; low tide ... / all that lay hidden / brought to light; another birthday / the leaves fall more / swiftly now.*
—mrb

Light Packing, by Elmedin Kadric (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2020). 106 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-53-1. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Born in Serbia in 1990, now living and “writing out of” Sweden, Kadric explores personal dislocations in time and place in this, his second collection of haiku. Eighty-eight poems, all previously published, are arranged in four sections. In the first, the interplay of “I” and “us” complicates erotic love and young marriage. In the second, the refugee exchanges war-torn life for one with transgressions of another sort: hypocrisies, “rubber soles,” and “living a / price tag” among them. The third addresses loss—loss of time, loss of loved ones—and the “light packing” that enables one to survive the “autumn evening” of grief. The fourth and final section rests on choosing hope, the “takeoff / of a cosmos seed” or the “soft rain” that “beats lying.” These four sections are self-contained; they are also, inevitably, bound together by common themes, images, and tensions that reverberate across the whole. No doubt about it, *Light Packing* makes for an uncommon and compelling read, particularly given Kadric's skill with minimal ku and experimental tropes. Yet here and there the mood and pace stutters on a (comparatively) weak poem or overly repeated image.

Some judicious pruning would have made the overall excellence of the collection truly sing. *outside the zoo / a family of refugees / feeds the pigeons; waning moon / space / a thief left; nothing but / nothing but / spring wind.*
—mrb

One Breath, by Ben Gaa (Kansas City, MI: Spartan Press, 2020). 53 pages; 5" × 7". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-952411-21-2. Price: \$13.00 for online booksellers.

This fifth book by “your friendly neighborhood haiku poet” Ben Gaa is a fine, full-length collection of 150 poems. Beginning with “alone again / at the water’s edge/ white egret,” the opening page of haiku somehow encourages reading for narrative thread. Yet this story is not about what happens, it is about what endures: moments of daily awareness, of acceptance, of connection and estrangement as the poet—and we with him—walk through the same day by day by day. Gaa excels at finding the unfamiliar in his familiar round of music-making, bar-hopping, poetry reading and writing. Yet a sense of stasis cannot be shaken. Two ku, the first near and the second at the end of the collection, suggest that despite the passage of time, much remains frozen: *the pause / before the light turns green / I become a deer* and *nothing left to say ... / the oak’s / bare branches.*
—mrb

Park Bench Memories: Haiku Tailwinds, by Gary Hotham (Scaggsville, Maryland: Yiqralo Press, 2020). 38 pages; 5" × 7¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 9798667125679. Price: \$5.00 from www.amazon.com

Herein find a finely-crafted meditation on the death of a family elder—daughter, mother, grandmother, “child of God.” Hotham weaves repeating images of clouds, snow and more into an ache for that which is “not written down.” Nor can be. *city limits / the wind losing / touch.* Placed one haiku per page, each spread invites the reader into deeper ruminations.

Only consider the pairing of *sea fog / a way to hear / the rocks* with *passing shower / words the rain takes / from us*. A short, religious take on “Personal Versus Impersonal” serves as postscript. With photographs by the poet. Recommended. —mrb

Rattled, ed. Corine Timmer (Portugal: Bicaideideias Publishing, 2020). 50 pages; 5¼" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-9-8999760-4-7. Price: 12.00 euros from www.bicaideideias.com

Who doesn't know by now what to expect of a new anthology from Corinne Timmer? Clever and adorable illustrations, clever and adorable haiku, clever and adorable animals—even rats! It's all great fun and to great purpose. This time the proceeds from sales benefit APOPO, a charity known for training rats to sniff out landmines and tuberculosis—106,000 landmines and 12,000 TB positive patients in the last twenty years. From haiku poets around the world, this selection: *grandma's room / the rat's tail curls around / her lullaby* (Praniti Gulyani); *year of the rat / the sweet taste of a stamp / on my tongue* (Agus Maulana Sunjaya); *APOPO heroes / patrolling the front lines / with rattitude* (Diane Tomczak). Recommended. —mrb

All This Talk: Yuki Teikei Haiku Society Members' Anthology 2020, ed. Charles Trumbull (San Jose, Calif.: Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, 2020). 139 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7357235-0-1. Price: \$15.00 from www.yths.org

We have an affinity for local groups and enjoy when they memorialize their activities with group anthologies. So much of the haiku community's history is in these groups and it is so often lost. Not the case with the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society. Their 2020 anthology contains a wealth of member poems, haiga, the 2020 Tokutomi Contest results, and essays on their various outreach projects. Of particular interest is a long piece on the history of their annual Asilomar retreat. Recommended. —pm

Tùkhòne: Where the River Narrows and Shores Bend, by D.A. Lockhart (Canada: Black Moss Press, 2020). 60 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-887536-15-1. Price: \$18.95 from www.blackmosspress.com

In this slim volume, D.A. Lockhart, author of multiple collections of long-form poetry and prose, marries haiku and haibun forms to Native American concerns with language and place. A turtle clan citizen of the Moravian of the Thames First Nation, Lockhart freely injects Lenape terms into his poetry as he explores the decolonial geography of *Tùkhòne*, a region spreading from Windsor, Ontario in Canada to Detroit, Michigan in the U.S. Thirteen Lenape-named moons—e.g. *Mëxate Kishux*, Deep Snow Moon, and *Amëwe Kishux*, Bee Moon—frame sequences of five, eight and nine haiku. Additionally, seventeen haibun revolve around the “medicine songs” that howl through the streets of Detroit—songs by Marvin Gaye, Glen Frey, Aretha Franklin, Gil Scott-Heron and others. In *Èhëliwsikakw Wëntxën [West Wind] Crosses Tùkhòne Sipu, Sings Between Highrises*, a haibun written “after Bob Seger’s ‘Against the Wind,’” the poet-narrator walks “car-choked streets” alert to the necessity of return “against the wind” to where “roots need to be pushed downward.” The capping ku, representative of the collection as a whole, suggests that Lockhart may owe more to the haiku of Gerald Visenor, Chippewa scholar and haiku poet first active in the 1960s, than to current practice in English-language haiku: *Across the water, / casino light burns red / mimes sun beyond bridge.* —mrb

Between Now and Now, by Marcus Liljedahl (No place: Yavanika Press, 2020). 23 pages; ebook. No ISBN. Price: \$2.50 download from www.yavanikapress.wixsite.com/home

The twenty poems that make up *Between Now and Now* are enjoyable and thought-provoking. The poems are sentence-like, without formal breaks, and often in one line. There is a violence of both creation (*the shielded sky we fell from darkens with birds of prey*) and existence (*through black smoke*

your fist has a slave name) as Liljedahl takes the reader through surreal landscapes. Yet despite these imaginative abstractions the poems are accessible to reader emotions. —pm

A Small Tree of Tender Leaves, by K. Ramesh (India: CinnamonTeal Design and Publishing, 2020). 53 pages; 4½" × 6½". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-93-87676-61-9. Price: \$1.99 Kindle version from www.amazon.com; 200 rupees perfectbound version from www.amazon.in

Ramesh has been a familiar voice in *Modern Haiku* for over a decade. He writes of his native India, especially its rural areas, as he travels from locale to locale. He has a wide-ranging eye and the reader doesn't tire of the journey. Many poems are nostalgic sketches, as if Ramesh is revisiting key moments of his childhood, yet others have strong resonances. An enjoyable outing. *phone call ... / the chirp / of a hometown bird; long train journey ... / a baby boy talks to his brother / in his own language.* —pm

Sky Quake, by Thorvald Berthelsen (India: Cyberwit, 2020). 111 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-9-390202-4-85. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

A collection of haiku in English and Arabic by Danish poet Berthelsen. The poems all contain titles and are often followed by three-line statements, albeit poetic, but too often mysterious in an abstract way that we struggle to understand. For example, the title "Widened" precedes *Circling gulls / open up the horizon / through screams of time*. Here the title doesn't seem to add anything and while the last line is clever, surely its meaning is personal to Berthelsen. We are all for surrealism in haiku, but there still needs to be some accessible point for the reader to share. Another title: "Poem about nourishment:" *The poem does not / understand humans. / Does the umbilical cord?* —pm

Spring Visitors, by Joseph M. Kusmiss (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2020). 84 pages; 6¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-64-7. Price: \$15.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

The haiku in this second chapbook from Joseph Kusmiss tend to the shasei end of haiku, as the poet records what comes and goes on his daily walks. Yet, as the reader walks with him through spring into winter, the feeling grows that disarming images of flora and fauna indirectly reveal emotional disclosures of weight. In the end, *Spring Visitors* becomes a discreet and reticent meditation on lived experience. *though unbidden / they arrive— / the dandelions; late summer / an old red house / with a broken fence; on my morning walk / a Harley-Davidson glove / and a dead mouse.* —mrB

Staten Island, by Stanford M. Forrester / Sekiro (Windsor, Conn.: nut wagon press, 2020). 12 pages; 2¾" × 4". Matte yellow card covers; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. Price: \$3.50 from Bottle Rockets Press, P.O. Box 189, Windsor, CT 06095.

Ten haiku and senryu on no one theme by the editor of *Bottle Rockets*. Despite their varying topics, the small chapbook is an enjoyable read. Forrester has a good handle on the form. *Staten Island—oh the poem i could leave / in wet cement; gone for a minute / & a maple leaf / took my seat.* —pm

Travel Souvenirs: Haiku from Near and Far, by Adelaide B. Shaw (India: Cyberwit, 2020). 94 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy black and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-81-948271-3-9. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

In this, her third chapbook, Adelaide Shaw presents us with a travelogue of her life. Upwards of eighty-five haiku represent, in her words, intangible “souvenirs” of the many places she has been in the last sixty years,

from the Los Angeles of her youth; to the Europe, the Caribbean, the Arab Emirates and more of mid-life; and, at last, to the upstate New York of later life. This reader found herself gravitating towards those “keep-sakes” that reveal, not just the outer, but also the inner journey: *red hibiscus / tucked behind my ear— / in love again* (Granada, 1973); *a gull’s flight / the speed in which lives / come and go* (County Clare, 2010); *meandering stroll / we take the lane / with wildflowers* (upstate New York, circa 2006 – 2019). —mrb

Le Mot Juste, by Paul Yates (United Kingdom: Paul Yates Art Ltd, 2020). 39 pages; ebook. No ISBN. Price: \$9.99 from online booksellers.

Paul Yates is an artist who has worked in painting, film, and poetry; and in *Le Mot Juste* he tries his hand at haiku. The collection contains fifty-five titled haiku, in which the three lines that follow the title explain more than they suggest. For example, the title “Riverbed, Upper Slaughter, Cotswolds” simply acts as the setting for an impression: *an oil drum timpani, / chopsticks played on / aniseed ball amber keys ...* The majority of the poems never seek to go deeper than surface impressions. Another: “Storm on Road to Attical:” *Scots pines dancing on the / spot, old girls trying clothes / at a jumble sale ...* —pm

Home After a Long Absence, by Olivier Schopfer (India: Cyberwit, 2020). 57 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-9-390202-7-68. Price: \$15.00 from online booksellers.

Collected haiku, senryu, and a few tanka from the Swiss poet. His senryu are nice insights into the ironies of modern life, things all readers can appreciate: *bitter dispute / the washer goes into / its spin-dry cycle*. These interesting leaps are evident in his haiku as well. Their payoff is more juxtaposition, discovery or surprise, than complementary pairing. An enjoyable outing. The title poem: *home after / a long absence / lilacs in bloom*. —pm

Awakening and Visitation, by Wally Swist (Brunswick, Maine: Shanti Arts Publishing, 2020). 132 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-951651-46-6. Price: \$15.95 from online booksellers.

A collection of longer poems that includes a small section of haiku and haiku-related work. Of the longer poems, nearly fifty of them, many were published in a variety of places: from the *Baseball Bard* to *Buddhist Poetry Review*, the *Galway Review* to *Tuck: Online Political, Human Rights, and Arts Magazine*; yet all the poems are genuine Swist and contain a deeply spiritual reverence for both humankind and the environment—including the angelic. Of interest were a couple of longer poems that reference haiku, one especially is a poetic email to poet Allan Burns on a haiku of his in *Where the River Goes*. A final section of the book includes a quartet of Swist's haiku, his haibun "Finding the Numerous in the Commonplace," and his translations of the "Haiku Postcards of Aneyakouji Street," the last which appeared in *MH* 51.2. This book is something of a catch-all, yet Swist consistently makes connections in his poems in a very haiku-like manner—whether in free verse, sonnet, or haiku. —pm