
REVIEWS

The Wild Beyond Echoing: James Hackett's Haiku Way, by Paul Russell Miller (United Kingdom: Grandad Publishing, 2021). 146 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-9995931-4-8. Price: \$15.00 from the author at pr.miller@live.co.uk

Review by Mike Spikes

In the brief Preface to *The Wild Beyond Echoing*, Paul Russell Miller, a British haiku poet and painter, makes the aim of his book abundantly clear. He intends to recognize and establish the excellence of James Hackett's poetry, which, Miller contends, is currently neglected and undervalued. Hackett, a pioneer of American haiku who was born in 1929 and died in 2015, adhered closely to classical tenets of the genre, a number of which he himself adumbrated in lists of "Suggestions" with which he concluded his books. Miller retrospectively applies seventeen of these suggestions to Hackett's work in order to demonstrate "the power and persuasiveness his poems may still contain for the genre's continuing journey."

One of the many merits of Miller's book is its clear and useful organization. Each of the seventeen suggestions receives a separate chapter, each chapter having as its title a particular one of these suggestions. For example, chapter one is entitled "The present is the touchstone of the haiku experience, so always be aware of this present moment"; chapter eleven "Avoid rhyme in haiku. Read each verse aloud to make sure it sounds natural"; and chapter thirteen "Never use obscure allusions; real haiku are intuitive, not abstract or intellectual." In each chapter Miller gives examples of specific Hackett haiku that demonstrate the principle that the chapter's title names. The analyses of these poems are unfailingly insightful and do an excellent job of illuminating the classical tenets which they illustrate.

A repeated strategy Miller employs in order to highlight the qualities of Hackett's haiku is to contrast a poem by some other poet that veers from a particular classical haiku principle with one by Hackett that adheres to it. The contrast is always designed to promote the superiority of the Hackett text and the principle it represents. For example, Miller cites Nick Virgilio's "lily: / out of water... / out of itself" as an instance of a "new 'bare bones' approach to writing which very much remains in the ascendant" and judges Virgilio's text as inferior to Hackett's haiku "Each bud of iris / although tightly sheathed in green / hints the hue within" which demonstrably eschews this "'bare bones' approach." Hackett's poem, Miller argues, provides a "whole experience, whole relationship, and a whole clear communication to others" that Virgilio's lacks.

On the one hand, one wonders why it is necessary to denigrate the Virgilio haiku in order to establish the excellence of the Hackett poem. Miller certainly presents a strong argument for what Hackett's text can do that Virgilio's can't, but cannot Virgilio's poem, in its minimalism, be seen as achieving a certain poignancy and provocative open-endedness that isn't present in Hackett's? Yet, on the other hand, Miller's adversarial approach is entirely understandable, given his purpose. It accomplishes a strategic end; the stark contrast clearly illuminates the classic haiku principle and Hackett's superb execution of it. In fact, Miller is very much aware of his indebtedness to his adversaries. In the Acknowledgements section of the book, he identifies specific contemporary haiku poets and theorists with whom he takes issue, freely recognizing their contributions to his own counter perspective: "My departure from the views they [those with whom he disagrees] each hold is itself a compliment to their scholarship, without which my own position wouldn't have evolved."

Miller closes his book by expressing his hope that "what I've written here will rekindle interest in Hackett's work, both for itself and the wider purpose he always intended it to have." That hope, I believe, is fully realized in the pages of *The Wild Beyond Echoing*. Miller provides countless examples of Hackett's many excellent haiku with which the average reader may not be familiar; he reminds us of the potential value of classical haiku principles, a number of which have recently fallen out of favor in certain circles; and he adroitly demonstrates the thematic and aesthetic

ends Hackett is able to achieve through his classically constructed poems. The reader who may be familiar with Hackett's pioneering poems only through a few selections in haiku anthologies will indeed find his or her interest in the poet's work, and its "wider purpose," sparked by Miller's book.

My Red: The Selected Haiku of John Stevenson, eds. Randy & Shirley Brooks (Taylorville, Ill.: Brooks Books, 2021). 160 pages; 6¼" × 9¼". Matte red and white covers; hardcover. ISBN 978-1-929820-21-4. Price: \$30.00 from www.brooksbookshaiku.com

Review by Cherie Hunter Day

The term *quale* (plural, *qualia*), from the Latin for "of what kind," was used by philosopher C. S. Peirce in 1866 to describe how we perceive sensations—the thus-ness of phenomena. One common example of a *quale* is the redness of red. When someone says "red," we immediately think of the color on the electromagnetic spectrum with a specific wavelength and frequency. No one can touch this red or compare your perception of red against mine. And yet they exist independently with qualities that are intuitively understood. These discernments are purely subjective and thus cannot be debated.

John Stevenson launches us into the middle of this theory of mind with his title poem.

pretty sure my red is your red

It is seemingly straightforward, but as we consider the concept of *qualia*, it is anything but simple. Stevenson is a master observer of human nature and a distiller of sensations.

The impetus and the selection process for *My Red: The Selected Haiku of John Stevenson* is clearly stated in the Publisher's Note that opens the collection. This title is part of a clothbound series of books by haiku