

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Awakened One: Buddha-Themed Haiku from Around the World, eds. Adjei Agyei-Baah and Gabriel Rosenstock (Boulder, Colo.: Poetry Chaikhana, 2021). 107 pages; 5" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9854679-9-9. Price: \$8.95 from online booksellers.

For those interested in the link between Buddhist thought and haiku practice, *The Awakened One* offers a “poetic dialogue” between Japanese haikai of the past and contemporary haiku poets from around the world. Editor Gabriel Rosenstock has written before of haiku as spiritual enlightenment; here, with co-editor Adjei Agyei-Baah, he proposes some sixty-nine pairings of old and new poets meant to demonstrate “the nature of awareness across culture and time.” With Japanese “masters” in larger font than the global moderns, contemporary insights may seem visually rendered as echoes, yet the links—imagistic, thematic, or both—are mostly not that obvious. In the book’s eight parts, each headed with a saying of the Buddha, readers will find much to puzzle over, and should they so desire, to meditate upon. *Oh the dragonfly! / he has dressed himself in the / color of autumn* (Hori Bakusui [1718-1783]) pairs with *imitating the buddha / my smile too / painted on* (Mike Rehling [USA]); *summer morning... / a child in deep poverty / drags a head of cabbage* (Ippekiro Nakatsuka [1887-1946]) pairs with *refugee camp... / the cricket chirps / in the broken vessel* (Hifsa Ashraf [Pakistan]). —mrb (Michele Root-Bernstein)

The Lure of the Threshold, by Sonam Chhoki. Foreword by Mike Montreuil; Afterword by Glenn G. Coats (Canada: Editions des Petits Nuages, 2021). 31 pages; Ebook. ISBN 978-1-926519-58-6. Price: \$3.36 from amazon.com

A strong showing from an unusual voice. The Bhutanese poet Sonam Chhoki offers twenty-one haibun mingling surreal visions with oral storytelling of the Lo-zey tradition with personal presence. As she writes in

the introduction to the book, Chhoki is “taken with the possibility that the haibun offers of exploring the hinterland of the margins of consciousness, where the strange and the familiar elide.” At her best, the results are inspired and inspiring, especially for the way the illogics of dream and spiritual yearning resolve into here-and-now haiku imagery. In the eponymous “Lure of the Threshold,” a night-prowling hound “in wait for a passer-by” sniffs out a shadowed figure holding out “a bejeweled hand. Together they climb into the moon.” The capping haiku: *passing breeze — / white buddleia blooms / spread butterfly wings*. In “The Absurd Expanse of Bliss,” someone climbs “the dream rope” into the silent night sky to “hear the moon laugh.” The capping haiku: *temple gong / toppled in the quake / hibiscus belling in the wind*. —mrb

Darkness in a Noonday Night, by Barbara Tate (Windsor, Conn.: Café Nietzsche Press, 2021). 110 pages; 5½" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-7366037-0-3. Price: \$12.00. Inquire of the author at dbandr2006@gmail.com

Barbara Tate’s most recent collection of haiku and related forms, *Darkness in a Noonday Night*, is a poetic title that refers to darkness at midday. Perhaps brought on by a storm or an eclipse. Or maybe it’s another way of saying “midnight.” Either way, the themes of Tate’s latest offering are not dark but human. Aging, sickness, and the isolation one can feel (with or without a global pandemic). But there is discovery at every turn as well. She is an observant poet who has reflected on a long life with a keen eye for details often overlooked. *trail dust / the only thing left / between us*. *Darkness in a Noonday Night* is a handsome book with high production values (from editor/publisher/ poet Stanford M. Forrester, known for his bottle rockets press imprint). The majority of the book is made up of forty-nine haiku (one to every other page) with a handful of tanka, tanka prose, and haibun at the end. A welcome addition from a devoted practitioner of the haikai arts. *solitude / I lose the chess game / to my alter ego; visiting hours / everyone brings their own / opinion; Grand Canyon / I break out in a flight / of song*. —pn (Peter Newton)

Light and Counterlight, by Mark Miller (Australia: Ginninderra Press, 2020). 87 pages; 5" × 7¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-761090-44-8. Price: A\$20.00 from www.ginninderrapress.com.au

The Australian poet Mark Miller offers his first collection of haiku in a somewhat unusual, yet effective format. The book is divided into fifteen titled parts, each part comprised of four to nine haiku, appearing two or three to a page (up to six a spread). This may sound a bit dense, but in fact there's a lot of white space for mind-wandering—about a third of the book's pages are used to separate one part from the other. Consequently, the work reads like a series of short meditations on the natural signs of light and shadow, song and silence, clarity and murk, the whole tied together by recurring imagery, the seasonal round, and a reader's responsive thoughts. *harbour dawn / the ship's horn opening / a space in mist; dusk coming on the trees filling with crows; gum tree bark / the Dreamtime art / of scribbly moths.* —mrb

Retweets, by Orrin PréJean and B.A. France (No place: Yasuke Press, 2021). 34 pages. Ebook. No ISBN. Price: free download at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DiEjrDG1dzii9UF1ubWSsUfCbrh6OiaY/view>

Read this free echapbook for the meet-cute of two poets fairly new to haikai, yet surely (as it says at the back) "at the top of their game." Game it is. Admiring each other's work on daily twitter feeds, Orrin PréJean and B.A. France decided to turn some of that digital sharing into a call and response linking of their two voices in twenty-nine senryu. There are missteps (a few poems are, in context, weak), but these are not enough to spoil a sequencing shot through with brilliance. Two exemplary pairings: *afternoon train ride into his arms his scent* (PréJean) with *changed / from who I used to be / ... moonrise* (France) and *fragrance / on the pillow case / quiet obsession* (France) with *tonight of all nights / long train ride / to nowhere* (PréJean). —mrb

The Cottage of Visions: Decorated Works 2018 – 2021, ed. Stephen Henry Gill (Japan: Hailstone Haiku Circle Publications, 2021). 160 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Matte black and grey card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-4-9911809-1-0. Price: \$18.00. Inquire of indigoapple28@gmail.com

The fourth—and final—anthology of “decorated haibun” from a series of international contests that began with the Kikakuza International Haibun Contest 2009 – 11 and culminate here in the last four years of Genjuan Haibun Contests. The volume includes winning haibun (Grand Prix, An Cottage Prizes, Honorable Mentions) and judges commentary, as well as a section of haibun by the judges and a sample of model Japanese haibun. For reference only, the editors include contest guidelines explaining its dual purpose: “[T]o encourage the writing of fine haibun in English and maintain the connection between the traditional Japanese perception of *haikai*-style prose and what is evolving around the world.” The first intent seems to have been more than amply met, given that the contest from 2018 – 2021 averaged 116 entries per year from 18 countries, with winners from the U.S., Canada, Australia, Ireland, Italy, India, Romania, Denmark, and Japan. The second intent, to maintain or promote traditional haikai aesthetics, may have been less successful, at least in the eyes of some judges, whose commentary is laced with reservations about subject matter and capping verse. Take for instance, Margaret Chula’s “Great Horned Owl,” an honorable mention for 2021. The poet contemplates the bird’s call through an “open window” as a kind of “ancestor coming to lay a hand on my forehead” that ends with “*half ghost, half grandmother / that thing with feathers / that perches in my heart.*” According to one judge, as warm and “inviting” as is the prose, the concluding poem is “neither a haiku nor a senryu.” None of the judges seem to have caught the reference to Emily Dickenson’s “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers,” thus missing an opportunity to recognize traditional aesthetics in new garb. For isn’t “*half ghost, half grandmother*” a honkadori in the best sense, connecting poetic practice across cultures and centuries in the very act of renewal? —mrb

Water and Stone: Ten Years of Art and Haiku, by Annette Makino (Arcata, Calif.: Makino Studios, 2021). 123 pages; 8" × 10". Matte four-color cards covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-519290-1-42. Price: \$24.99 from online booksellers.

This first full-length collection presents fifty haiga and fifteen autobiographical haibun by a poet-painter whom Stephen Addiss places “among the leaders of haiku painting.” Makino organizes her work seasonally, interspersing linked forms in such a way as to tell a story of who she is. The haibun offer peeks into her family life, her love of art, and various of her philosophical musings in an engaging, down-to-earth manner. Considering “the (very) long view” of all our daily strivings, she remarks, “in geological time, all this effort will amount to approximately zip.” What matters in the end, “is the energy we put out in the world as we do our work. Call it love.” Love, indeed, is what seems to inspire Makino’s haiga, visually rendered in Japanese watercolors and sumi ink in an unpretentious style that illustrates and interprets her charming haiku. This reader’s favorites include “*fog-shrouded coast / we listen / to the view*,” superimposed on a foggy scene; “*lines of foam / over and over the sea / writes its story*,” juxtaposed to some seagulls at the tide line; and “*cowlick / some part of me / still wild*,” linked to a close-up of pink wildflowers. —mrb

A Landscape in Pieces, by John Martone (No place [Charleston, Ill.]: Tufo, 2021). 208 pages; 4" × 6". Matte black and white card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: inquire of the author at jpmx@proton-mail.com

We have briefly reviewed the work of John Martone before, most recently three books in the year 2019. Those readers who valued then his ongoing experimentation with “terse thoughts and probable verse” (brief review, 50.3) will no doubt value this next installment of same. Those who seek to apply “acts of minimal language” (brief review, 50.1) within the aesthetic frame of a new haiku may not. And yet, in the 200 poems or so that make up *A Landscape*, it is more than possible to find what must also be

taken for intriguing haiku: *small rivers / named for / lost people; soup & sandwich — / we'd walk home / / for lunch / and back in time; locked in / the autistic man / a fig tree's flower.* —mrb

Failed State, by Dave Bonta (Tyrone, Penn.: Via Negativa Books, 2021). 85 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: \$15.89 from online booksellers.

Best known for his influential poetry film blog *Moving Poems*, Dave Bonta is also a prolific poet. *Failed State* is Bonta's seventh book and his first of haibun. It is a handsome hardback with a photo of a waiting room on the cover and a TV showing flames. From the start, Bonta's got something to say. He is at his best as a haibun writer when he maintains an equal measure of prose and haiku with just enough left out to hold the reader's interest and imagination. That being said, *Failed State* is successful in delivering a wide range of Bonta's talent as a writer. The sixty-six haibun are divided into five sections that highlight traditional and experimental versions of the form. Much of the book reads as lyrical and smart socio-political commentary. Seven of the haibun are erasure poems using the text from a CIA manual on interrogation techniques. Compelling in their inventiveness, the erasure poems stretch the meaning of haibun. All in all, *Failed State* is a fine collection that includes many strong examples. In the last section Bonta ruminates in the title haibun on the collapse of civilization if only in subtle increments. Heartfelt and honest, *Failed State* is an astute observation of the human condition whose spotlight is as often on Bonta himself as it is on others. Are we witnessing the world go up in flames, metaphorically? Literally? Perhaps. If so, Bonta seems to suggest that the truth is unavoidable. It's on every channel and closer than one might suspect. "Cocooned in our personal entertainment systems, we crowd the streets and highways twice a day, darting glances at our provisional neighbors." *trigger warning / a clear blue sky / in Waziristan.* —pn

The Alchemy of Tea, by Pat Benedict Campbell (Canada: Catkin Press, 2019). 64 pages; 7" × 7". Black and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-928163-31-2. Price: inquire of the author at pmbenedict739@gmail.com

Pat Benedict Campbell's recent book of haiku and tanka, *the alchemy of tea*, showcases the accumulated work of an accomplished poet. Immersed in her words, the reader is transported to the scenes of which she writes, many of them reflecting a certain domestic tranquility. With a dedication to family, friendships, and landscape Campbell offers a refreshing pluckiness, as in the title poem: *old arguments / put to rights / the alchemy of tea*. Her unique turn of phrase "put to rights" perhaps reflects her upbringing in Ireland combined with the wisdom of an experienced person. With a background in theater, Campbell expresses her introduction to haiku as a drama student in the Author's Note: "... being in the moment in haiku was very akin to being in the moment as an actor." Like an actor, she is a limber haiku poet, spontaneous and skilled. Clearly, Campbell has perfected her craft. The book is divided into four seasonal sections of 115 haiku followed by a fifth section for tanka and a sixth of tanka dedicated to the poet's late husband, for a total of forty-nine tanka. Many of the individual poems are well worth multiple readings. However, at four haiku to a page the field is a bit crowded and discourages such review. This may be a small aesthetic quibble as well as an opportunity to remember the importance of white space when it comes to the short-form poem. Breathing room is dreaming room. *after the rain / cherry blossom footprints / all through the house; his diagnosis / our dreams move ahead / without us; my feet numb with cold / I find his battered slippers / ripped from dog bites / and loved / beyond repair.* —pn

The World Disappears, by Mark Forrester (Windsor, Conn.: Baby Buddha Press, 2021). 58 pages; 4¼" × 5". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. Price: \$13.00 from the author at www.buddharat.squarespace.com

Despite having written haiku and its related forms for more than a dozen years, Mark Forrester's *The World Disappears* is his first collection. Like many of the poems in this book of forty-five haiku, Forrester's title offers much the reader can ponder. Does the world disappear because something has happened to it? Or does the world disappear because the one who is observing the world has shifted focus? Of course, the answer is "yes" to both questions. A good haiku invites interrogation. *beyond my door / the world disappears — / morning haze*. It's comforting to know that Forrester keeps a watchful eye on the world which, in this case, is only temporarily lost from view. He takes solace in the natural world, which is true in many of his poems. He reveals familiar scenes that conceal other hidden truths, with a hint of humor. *summer's end / the bathroom door / stops sticking*. As cooler days approach a change in atmospheric pressure has caused the door to unswell. Does life get easier the deeper we advance over the course of a calendar year? Over the course of one's life? Perhaps. Either way, the pressure is off. Simple and straightforward in style, Forrester's poems are accessible and engaging. They are rewarding on multiple re-readings and deliver just the right number of words. There's nothing overstated, which is the mark of a seasoned haiku poet. He shares an optimist's viewpoint that inspires optimism. He is a poet who inspires others to write more haiku. *The World Disappears* is a polished accomplishment. Its quality (and pocket-size) makes Forrester's world a welcome companion on any afternoon walk. *Juneteenth / on one side of town / fireworks; high noon / my own shadow / abandons me; oxygen tank — / his granddaughter brings / daffodils*. —pn

Grandmother's Pearls: Dream Anthology, ed. Alexis Rotella (Greensboro, N.C.: Jade Mountain Press, 2021). 117 pages; 6" x 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-529608-22-7. Price: \$19.00 (\$9.99 ebook) from www.amazon.com

Some thirty poets and visual artists have united here under the curation of the accomplished and well-known poet and digital artist Alexis Rotella. Dive in anywhere into this book of wonders and it is sure to be an

invigorating swim. The majority of *Grandmother's Pearls* is devoted to showcasing Rotella's haibun, which are her dreams themselves. A choice Rotella explains in her compelling Preface that offers a fascinating overview of the poet's extensive academic study of dreams. Rotella invited her collaborators to join her in writing not just about dreams but recreating their own dreams in haibun and related forms. There are several monoku, tanka, tanka prose, senryu, cherita, and haiku dispersed among the haibun. The variety is as unpredictable and exciting as so many dreams would be. The whole concept makes for compelling reading. There's also the arresting artwork—some fourteen colorful imaginings throughout by collaborating visual artists. Several haibun recount the interactions with the dead, perhaps a common subject of dreams. Certainly, a subject to which we can all relate. Rotella seems to have managed one foot in each world—one of waking and one of dreaming. In “Life Goes On” Rotella encounters her deceased mother on the day of her burial outside “picking bluebells along the path” instead of lying in a casket. The piece ends with her mother's beautifully haunting line: “You mean those hymns they're singing are for me?” Followed by the capping haiku: *Holding me still / a song from a bird / I'll never see*. Despite the gravity of many of the haibun, *Grandmother's Pearls* is a fun romp through a myriad of imaginations. The anthology as a whole is an inspiration. Now, to delve into the treasure trove of one's own dreams for the hidden songs within. —pn

Speed of Light, by Jeannie Martin (Windsor, Conn.: Baby Buddha Press, 2021). 38 pages; 3" × 4½". Glossy four-color card covers; saddle-stapled. No ISBN. Price: \$5.00. Inquire of the author at jeanniejeanne@gmail.com.

The latest chapbook from Martin, containing twenty-five haiku on the titular flower, nearly all containing some form of the noun “day lily.” There is a risk in such a collection that its narrowness and repetition of topic could deaden our senses to the flower. However, the breadth of its usage and the joy which Martin finds in it keeps the collection fresh. Day lilies are, of course, themselves (*blooms yellow / in the yellow sun / speed*

of light), but also act as occasional stand-ins for people (*by her bed / each morning / bouquet of day lilies*), and can be seen as magical beings (*mid-summer dream / all the day lilies say / good night! good night!*). A charming chapbook. —pm (Paul Miller)

The Life and Zen Poetry of Santoka Taneda, by Sumita Oyama, trans. William Scott Wilson (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, [2021]). 351 pages; 4¼" × 8¼". Matte four-color card covers; hardcover. ISBN 978-4-8053-1655-9. Price: \$19.99 (\$9.99 Kindle) from online booksellers.

Sumita Oyama (1899 – 1994) was a close friend and benefactor of Santoka. Not surprisingly, among his many writings were this biography of his friend, aptly translated by William Scott Wilson, and the four-volume *Collection of the Literary Work of Santoka*. The latter includes Santoka's *Diary of the One-Grass Hut*, which translator Wilson includes in the current volume. *The Life and Zen Poetry of Santoka Taneda* is a thorough biography, detailing the poet's life and struggles, his travels, as well as whom he met with and when. It includes over three hundred of Santoka's haiku, translated into three lines, and presented as composed throughout Santoka's tragic, yet self-inflicted history. A few well-known haiku as translated by Wilson: *Of the house where I was born / nothing remains: / fireflies. And: Men's privates, / women's, too; / the bubbling overflowing hot water*. Being a biography, it is at times overly detailed, and the reader may find themselves wishing for more discussion of Santoka's poetics—student as he was of anti-traditionalist Seisensui Ogiwara. However, such discussion doesn't occur much. That said, it is nice to have the background on favorite poems. I enjoyed learning that early in 1932 Santoka was begging on the outskirts of Ashiya when the weather turned cold. He was turned away from the houses at which he begged. As Sumita reports, "Suddenly at that moment, a shower of hail fell. Or rather than "fell," it struck him with a clang, sounding with a clatter on his bamboo hat." That would lead to one of the poet's most well-known haiku: *In my begging bowl, / too, / the hail*. Recommended. —pm

At the Train Crossing: Skin Cancer Haiku & Senryu, by Robert Epstein (West Union, W.V.: Middle Island Press, 2021). 131 pages; 5" × 8". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 979-8-457284-82-1. Price: \$14.00 from online booksellers.

Epstein is a prolific poet and editor. Besides the eleven anthologies he has produced, he has also published nineteen individual collections of haiku and senryu. The current volume progresses through Epstein's personal relationship with an atypical squamous cell carcinoma, with sections headed "Diagnosis," "Fog," "Busting Out," "Surrender," and finally "Everything." On the whole it is a satisfying collection that looks at cancer in a daily way, how it affects not just our long-term thinking and planning, but also how it affects the here-and-now as well. *zinc sunscreen — / I can't help but ask / if this could kill me too; crumbling stairs / leading nowhere / this skin cancer; John Muir Woods—no luck finding a postcard / for carcinoma.* —pm

Wasp on the Prayer Flag, by Maeve O'Sullivan (United Kingdom: Alba Publishing, 2021). 60 pages; 5¾" × 8¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-912773-39-8. Price: \$15.00 from www.alba-publishing.com

O'Sullivan's latest collection is comprised of standalone haiku, as well as haiku and senryu sequences—although the distinction between forms doesn't seem necessary in her case. In what she calls her haiku, she is very much a poet of place; in fact, many of her poems are on a particular locale (sequences: "Howth Head," "Seapoint Stroll," and "First visit to Inishbofin," to name a few). These names don't necessarily add deeper historical layers, as far as we can tell, but they do add a nice sense of place—a local spice, if you will, to the poems. For example, the sequence "Howth Head," which describes an outing to the peninsula north of Dublin, begins with the expansive haiku: *the wooden mermaid / gazes out to sea — / St. Brigid's Day*. The evocation of the Christian saint is a strong pairing with the pagan representation in several ways; however, the wider

historical background of St. Brigid doesn't seem to come into play. That said, it doesn't detract from the poem either. In fact, its inclusion as a local saint's day nicely grounds the poem. This particular sequence enjoys the appearance of a female stonechat later in the six-haiku sequence which is a welcome echo. Of what she calls her senryu, many revolve around her family, friends, or students. O'Sullivan's poetic sensibilities seem to touch all aspects of her life. *Wasp on the Prayer Flag* is a welcome addition to any haiku library. *the pier wall / warm against my bare calves — / June sunset; a smell of hops / along the south quays — / last bus home.* —pm

Bull-Headed, ed. Corine Timmer (Portugal: Bicaideias, 2021). 54 pages; 5½" × 8". Matte three-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-989-99760-5-4. Price: see www.bicaideias.com/bica-books

Similar to its two predecessor anthologies, the profits from editor Timmer's third outing support a worthy cause—in this case, Care for Cows Vrindavan, a shelter that cares for sick or injured cows in India. Using last year's Year of the Ox as a theme, the anthology contains seventy haiku by sixty-five international poets. As would be expected, the approaches are as varied as the poets. *school reunion — / the same old bulls / lock horns* (MacRury); *the pasture / redolent with cow pies / how my garden grows!* (Lester); *the old cow / lets down her milk ... / cradles of clover* (Moss). The poems are accompanied by the line drawings by Suresh Babu. —pm

Chrysalis, by Vincent Tripi. Eds. Jeannie Martin and John Martone (Northfield, Mass.: Swamp Press, 2022). 68 3"x5" cards in a 3¼" × 5¼" cork carrying-sleeve. No ISBN. Price: \$25.00 via PayPal from Ed@SwampPress.com

As mentioned in our Spotlight (page 69), upon his death Tripi left thousands of unpublished haiku typed onto 3"x5" cards. Editors Martin and Martone selected sixty-five poem-cards for a possible book, which ultimately Tripi's main publisher Ed Rayher at Swamp Press reproduced as

sixty-five cream-colored and numbered cards; a beautifully wrought cork slipcase holds the cards. It is a pleasing display, and somehow holding individual cards in hand makes us feel closer to Tripi. Tripi was both a respected and popular poet whose work, with its love of nature and openness to the mysteries of the universe—and his unique point of view—was in the school of Thoreau. The editors have done a good job selecting poems that showcase the various sides of Tripi's work. A particular favorite is the following poem which expands with each phrase, as if the forest was being created instant by instant in Tripi's mind—which of course it was: *Summer woods / my favorite tree hiding my favorite tree / hiding my favorite tree*. Others: *would it matter / plant sunflower seeds / in the dark; first of the bluebirds / OH please tell me / you've come through Brooklyn*. Rayner hints that there will be more volumes to come. Fingers crossed.
—pm