

Saffron Skies, by William Scott Galasso (Laguna Woods, Calif.: Galwin Press, 2022). 127 pages; 6" × 9". Matte four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-732752-73-3. Price: \$16.95 from online booksellers.

Reviewed by Laurie D. Morrissey

Saffron Skies is a varied collection containing haiku, tanka, and haibun. Galasso divided the poems into eight sections, most of which open with a black and white photo. On my first reading, I skipped “About the Author” and “Preface” and jumped right into “New Year’ Day,” which contains four haiku. The opening poem made me smile: *no longer young / we enter the new year / snoring*. Besides the gentle irony, I appreciate the economical language and the universality of the experience.

I began reading the second section, “Snow on Spruce,” during the year’s biggest snowstorm. It opens with a haiku about a storm-caused power outage, which I hoped would not be a portent. (It was.) Of the twenty-odd wintry haiku in this section, my favorite is *peat / in the whisky glass / first snow*. Haiku about alcohol are common, as Kristin Lindquist noted in her essay, “Embracing the Moon: Haiku about Drinking” (*Modern Haiku* 51.3), and Galasso’s is a fine example. The opening word itself is layered. Much is implied in these seven words, including the drinker(s). This haiku involves the ear, eye, and palate, and it highlights one of the things people do with spirits: mark the season. While some of the haiku in *Saffron Skies* are straightforward and do not invite me to linger, this is one of the ones I can dwell on and enjoy many times. “Snow on Spruce” also contains a dozen powerful haiku gathered into “Haiku for Ukraine.” Example: *snow / before a boot print / mars it*.

Of the next six sections, some contain one form only and others are a mixture. In a section containing more than seventy senryu, I took pleasure in finding musical themes in a good many. Bits of song lyrics are fun to discover here—especially in the case of this triple whammy: *anticipation ... / only you know and I know / you give me fever*. Some of these senryu resemble a plain observation, like a casual comment to a friend: *best sound / I’ve heard all day / baby’s chuckle*. A few of the strongest (with nods to Robert Frost and Dr. Seuss):

scratched LP time no longer on our side	open mic a moment's silence before the applause
split pill feeling better by half	quarantined all the places I would go
just a glance the road not taken between us	the scar never discussed about to be

In the section “Mixed Bag Tanka I,” I enjoyed a group of four ekphrastic tanka inspired by Edward Hopper’s New York cityscapes. In a summery section called “Sea and Sand,” I particularly liked “Canto for Sweets,” a long haibun that warmly captures the ephemeral pleasures of a camp summer. The section called “Vermilion Falling” (sharing a title with Galasso’s 1994 book), another fine drinking haiku appears: *first day of fall / I switch from gin / to whisky*. My favorite in this section is: *paddling swan / pushing daylight / to the shore*. This section (and the book) ends with the bittersweet *Thanksgiving / we share hors d’oeuvres / on Zoom*.

After reading the poetry in this volume, I read the “About the Author” page, preface, two acknowledgments sections, bio, and photo credits, which offer a great deal of explanation. The author’s photo lacks enough tonal contrast to distinguish Galasso’s face, unfortunately. I also considered the book’s title. I like titles to do some work, but it is not obvious to me what this title does since neither the poems nor the cover hint at saffron. That said, Vicki Ann Galasso’s painting makes for an attractive cover.

Shaped by the Sun, by Jeannie Martin (Windsor, Conn.: Buddha Baby Press, 2023). 68 pages; 4½" × 5¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. No ISBN. \$12.00 from Bottle Rockets Press, P.O. Box 189, Windsor, CT 06095.