

had died of AIDS in a series of haibun, or that John Ashbery has dabbled in the form at various points of his career. Haiku poets should also realize that Johnson is more interested in poetics than haiku. He will veer away from actual haiku to explore how the haiku's techniques and subject matter were adapted for longer, more famous poems. Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, H.D.'s lyrics, and the longer poems of Gary Snyder receive more discussion than any actual haiku. Haiku and haiku-like poems tend to disappear for pages at a time in favour of a discussion of techniques that the form inspired.

That said, there is much in *Haiku Poetics in Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Poetry* to engage and inspire any serious haiku poet. I would recommend hunting down a copy at a local college library if the price is prohibitive. It is well worth the search.

Nick Virgilio: A Life in Haiku, edited and with an introduction by Raffael de Gruttola and an afterword by Kathleen O'Toole. (Arlington, Va.: Turtle Light Press, 2012). 137 pages; 5½" x 8½". Glossy yellow and four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-974814-73-5. Price: \$14.95 from the publisher at <www.turtlelightpress.com>.

Reviewed by Christopher Patchel

My introduction to the work of Nick Virgilio was *The Haiku Anthology* (1999) edited by Cor van den Heuvel. The section devoted to Virgilio in that volume is one of the longest (only John Wills commands more space). Fourteen pages, a mini-anthology, it starts with the iconic "lily" haiku and artfully sequences through thirty-nine classics from Virgilio's twenty-seven-year span of published work. The poems are primarily memoir-like observations of Nick's day-to-day life in Camden, New Jersey. And whether scenic, urban, lighthearted,

or elegiac, his diverse haiku are marked by humanity. I was immediately impressed by that gallery of images, and still am.

All thirty-nine of those poems had first appeared in *Selected Haiku*, a compilation of Virgilio's work edited by Rod Willmot, the first edition (1985) letterpress printed and hand-bound, the second (1988) an expanded edition that was offset printed. Both books were well received, and Virgilio's haiku struck a resonant chord both inside and outside the haiku world, which makes it surprising, and unfortunate, that no further editions were ever published.

Enter *Nick Virgilio: A Life in Haiku* to a fanfare of publicity and praise, this being the first available Virgilio anthology in over twenty years, as well as a chance to re-celebrate his pioneering contribution to American haiku. Further adding to the buzz is the fact that most of these haiku are previously unpublished, culled from reams of Remington-typed pages stored in the Virgilio archive at Rutgers University—Camden. As it states on the front cover of the book: "A collection of newly discovered haiku gems by one of America's most beloved haiku poets (with a handful of old favorites, some essays, an interview and some photos thrown in too)."

But that handful of old favorites (which actually makes up almost a third of the collection) sets a standard that much of the newly discovered material can't match. No doubt publisher Rick Black and editor Raffael de Gruttola conceived this daunting project with the best of intentions. With hundreds, if not thousands, of never-before-seen poems at hand it made sense to attempt a fresh anthology that would appeal to longtime Virgilio admirers and new haiku enthusiasts alike. But it couldn't have taken long to realize what Rod Willmot noted in his introduction to *Selected Haiku*:

Virgilio is a prolific writer, and only a fraction of his haiku output appears on these pages. To borrow an analogy from baseball—fitting for so American a poet—he is the kind of batter who frequently strikes out, yet whose mighty swing, whenever it connects, produces an effect far greater than the timid efforts of more consistent players.

If that's the case with Virgilio's published work, how much more so his archived poems, many of which are drafts or outtakes? (Heaven forbid some of my early drafts are ever seen!) Thus, despite the publisher's reliance on a good many old favorites, the unevenness of the new material, which makes up the other two-thirds of this collection, is no less apparent.

Nevertheless, those who don't have the good fortune of owning Virgilio's *Selected Haiku* (the copy I'm using is strictly on loan) may welcome the inclusion of republished classics from that out-of-print collection, and everyone is bound to appreciate a good number of rescued haiku that this new collection brings to light for the first time:

my brother and I	sitting on a jetty ...
in the old cemetery	watching a seagull
reading epitaphs	float on a thermal

my father and I	signing myself out
quarreling face to face	of the coronary ward:
exchange breath	the sun on the lawn

Neither *Selected Haiku* nor *Nick Virgilio: A Life in Haiku* can be regarded as definitive anthologies, though the former comes close. Perhaps someone will take up the challenge of publishing a full retrospective, which would only be fitting given the Bard of Camden's enduring critical and popular appeal.