
REVIEWS

A Five Balloon Morning, by Charles Trumbull (Santa Fe, NM.: Red Mountain Press, 2013). 122 pages; 5½" x 5½". Matte speckled beige card covers with French flaps; speckled paper, perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9855031-3-0. Price: \$16.95 from the publisher at www.red-mountainpress.us

Reviewed by Hilary Tann

A Five-Balloon Morning is subtitled *New Mexico Haiku*. In his introduction, poet Charles Trumbull invites the reader to join him “in a kaleidoscopic look, through the lens of haiku, at the Land of Enchantment.” After a fifty-year absence, Trumbull “returned home” to Santa Fe in 2009, tracing his New Mexican roots to his grandfather’s arrival in 1904.

Though there is no table of contents, this slim volume of some 131 poems is arranged in five subgroups: Leaves From The Tree, Leaving New Mexico & Coming Back Home, A Coyote Circling, “Trinity,” and Turtle Dance. The poems are spaced widely on successive pages in appealing “found-poem” fashion and the soft-textured pages feel good in the hand.

Only the fourth group, “Trinity” (which Trumbull calls “an interlude about the momentous events of 1945”), is preceded by prose. He writes, “Human history changed in a flash on July 16, 1945, with the explosion of an atomic bomb.” The poems record, journal-style, his visit to the Trinity Site in October 2011, and they cross-fertilize each other and resonate with deeper meanings.

Trinity Site
in the guard’s vehicle
fuzzy dice

ground zero
we walk into a depression
decades old

Trumbull is well known to readers of *Modern Haiku*, having served as editor and publisher from 2006 to 2013. Other accomplishments include being an editor at Encyclopædia Britannica, founder of Deep North Press, past president of the Haiku Society of America, and current honorary curator of the American Haiku Archives at the California State Library in Sacramento. For the most part he wears his learning lightly in this publication, though he cannot resist drawing a historical parallel “between Edo-Period Japan and the years of exploration and colonization in New Mexico.”

fortune-teller’s sign
Se Habla Español
 would it be different?

weed-choked ruts
 of the Santa Fe Trail
 cross the barbed wire

Again, from his preface, Trumbull describes *A Five-Balloon Morning* (with the exception of the Trinity interlude) as a collection of “bits and pieces ... impressions ... a sentimental tour.” But this account suggests simple description and belies the nuanced underlayers of many of these haiku. In Trumbull’s words, “a haiku has to deliver more than simple description or everyday speech” (“Meaning in Haiku” *Frogpond* 35:3).

boulders fallen
 from the sandstone cliffs
 talk of family affairs

Carlsbad Caverns
 tourists flock to see
 the bat flight

along a strand of barbed wire dewdrops

Just one small quibble from this reader. Perhaps the next edition might include an unobtrusive set of footnotes for those of us who are not familiar with many of the Spanish words. There’s even a poem completely in Spanish with no translation. Words like piñon and adobe, and place names like Taos and Bandelier are welcome color, but *alameda* and *La Llorona*?

A Five-Balloon Morning is a lovingly witnessed collection of site-specific poems from a master haiku poet. The author is observant, thoughtful,

and knowledgeable. These are quiet poems of a keen viewer—a gift from New Mexico.

Philmont campout
too many extra stars
to find the constellations

pierced Chicago punk eye to eye with the Tewa silversmith

a Zodiac, by Paul Pfleuger, Jr. (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2013). 78 pages; 4¼" x 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-18-8. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Cherie Hunter Day

The days of the canary-colored, double-sided sheet of haiku dos and don'ts promulgated by Lorraine Ellis Harr are in the past. In the 1970s this type of checklist was aimed at beginning poets learning what set haiku apart from short poetry. Today more haiku writers are exploring the outer reaches of haiku, and Paul Pfleuger, Jr. is one of the leading poets expanding the world of "the new haiku."

Pfleuger makes inroads two ways—haiku layout and content. *a Zodiac* features 51 poems, but only 9 of those are the traditional three-line haiku construction like this much anthologized favorite:

a darkness so deep
I am surrounded
by gold beetles

The majority, just over half of the poems, are horizontal one-liners. Again an anthologized favorite plus the title poem:

in the incandescence let me let me read me to you

a zodiac a slow train held up to answer

The remaining layouts run the gambit from four-liners to vertical one-liners to verticals with atypical spacing to minimalist, single-word, three-liners. *a Zodiac* offers a primer of possibilities. An example of a vertical one liner:

salty
bodies
passing

close

the
fibbing
window

For some readers the deviation from three-line traditional haiku to one-line presentation is enough of a stretch, but Pfleuger invites further leaps. From the innovative layout of the book in four quadrants (haunt, plot, ground, and nest) rather than the four seasons to the haiku themselves, there is attention to detail at a personal and collective level. The reader gets the sense that everything is carefully considered and nothing is what it is on the surface. Poetic moments should not be delivered fully formed for easy consumption but should be worked for diligently and thoughtfully. Poet and reader work as co-creators.

Some of his haiku are easily graspable through concrete images, recognizable by sensation, but there are other pieces in *a Zodiac* that are meant to confound and thwart expectation. Take the following example:

in the full stop of red engines ago

As a single horizontal line the speed at which the reader processes the words is accelerated. While the line gathers momentum to a conclusion, the context of the words disrupts logic and slows the access to meaning. The line has at least three possible caesurae. A reader can break the line after “stop,” after “red,” or after “engines.” Flipping back and forth trying to decide between these possibilities runs counter to what the words say about a full stop. In the vertigo of multiple focal points the reddest red has been activated in the reader’s mind and the engines are revving. Then the line terminates in the word “ago.” Here again there are a couple of ways to read that word. As “ago” it can reference time past or as “a go” in the continuation of motion: the discontinuity of being here and not there versus the overall sweep of time. Time stops for no one. Do past and future coexist in now? Pfleuger artfully represents the situation and leaves the reader to sort it out for him or herself. Reading and misreading come into play with great effect in this haiku. It delivers a memorable moment that doesn’t lose its punch even after multiple readings.

There are other examples that remain opaque to analysis. Take for instance the following one liner:

in out coral reef breath plural of self

The coral reef is a concrete image, but how it relates to the breath is a mystery. In the context of the book, which touches on welcoming a new baby into the family unit, perhaps this poem addresses the division of roles. The coral reef is a composite of many individuals living in association for ecological benefit. Could Pfleuger associate the presence of different selves as a way of mounting protection for his infant daughter? It’s a stretch. This also raises the question about how familiar must the reader be with the details of the poet’s life in order to construct a plausible narrative. Richard Gilbert writes about the varying levels of resistance that readers experience with respect to disjunction in haiku. Readers may have different tolerances to opacity, but if the reader fails to find meaning after multiple tries, the default is frustration. It is humbling to come up empty handed. Then, is it enough for a poem to appeal to a select few readers or even just one reader—the writer?

The haiku in *a Zodiac* may take time to process the deconstruction and reconstruction of shimmering new wholes. It's not a quick or easy read, but for those readers with patience and open minds, there is much to savor and enjoy. It was Gertrude Stein who noted that "the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic, there is hardly a moment in between." With *a Zodiac* Paul Pfeuger, Jr. is well on his way.

Turn Turn, by Christopher Patchel (Winchester, Va: Red Moon Press, 2013.) 106 pages; 5"x7". Semigloss green card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-14-0. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com.

Reviewed by Michele Root-Bernstein

Christopher Patchel is a graphic designer as well as a poet. Pick up a copy of his first collection of haiku and see for yourself that every aspect of *Turn Turn* has been thoughtfully shaped for presentation. It seems fitting, then, to approach the chapbook as one would a chair, perhaps an Eames chair, and with a designer's concerns in mind—not only as a means of entering deeply within, but as a primer for those of us who would design their own chapbook-chairs.

Whether it's [a] house or film or chair—
it must have a structural concept ...

Charles Eames

Patchel's book opens to the word "Turn" upon a translucent sheet and through that veil we see the second "Turn" of the title. Literally, metaphorically, we prepare for the permutations of time through which the poet offers to guide us. There's no escaping the organizing theme that articulates the four "legs" of this chapbook-chair or the legs of our journey in its seat. Each part bears the weight of time in its turning: through the changing seasons, the small stories of our lives, their temporal flow and

dislocation, and the multifarious dimensions of time itself.

Patchel carefully shapes each strut. In addition to orienting titles, telling phrases taken from his haiku, there are simple visual images that complement the content. Patchel also channels literary culture beyond the haiku tradition with a series of epigraphs. The poetics of an Emily Dickinson, the story-telling of a Charles Dickens, the humor of a Mark Twain, the proverbial wisdom of an ancient world—these make up the company Patchel would have us keep as we read. Indeed, *Turn Turn* deals with nothing more or less than our pursuit of personal truth, our cultivation of uncertain memory, our sensitivity to the irony of our condition, our desire to make meaning from the stuff of our lives. Rather than overpower the individual haiku within, these concerns clarify their existential—and what may amount to the same thing, their aesthetic—appeal.

I only think about how they [chairs] look
in relation to how they are doing their job.

Charles Eames

Patchel has mastered what works best in the haiku tradition—childlike candor, negative space, apparent artlessness—and he marries these goods to modern introspections. In the sparest of ways, his haiku get the job done. From the smallest of observations, they deliver realization and insight. They reverberate so soundly within the structural concepts of the chapbook that, despite their particularities, they resonate in universal terms for his readers.

Along with the poet, we, too, wonder about our place in the scheme of things:

from the big bang to my funny bone

We mark moments of being:

thrush song
the play of light
on my eyelids

We revisit old sorrows, old regrets:

a shadow
and its butterfly
fall equinox

We seek safe passage through our days and nights:

ready or not goldenrod

We look towards new beginnings:

fingers set
on the home keys—
my resolutions

Speaking of cyclic repetitions, the astute reader may also find meaning in the hidden patterns that link one poem with another. Patchel has us “inch ... into the water” of early summer, for example, later to feel “the weight” of our bodies “out of water” as summer comes to an end. Similar pairs and series of haiku mark the passage of birthdays, the blooming and fading of relationships, and more. If each haiku functions to open up awareness, poems in orbit with others function to reaffirm the larger philosophy of the exercise. And Patchel makes it look easy.

They [chairs] must be comfortable—
comfortable for the kind of use they’re going to get.

Charles Eames

Good design is timeless, which is another way of saying that a good, an excellent chair is a comfortable chair, well-suited to the affordances of human use. A good, an excellent collection of haiku will be similarly comfortable, such that the poet’s voice enters the reader’s mind as his or her own. Patchel’s poems have that quality. Poem after poem delights and enlightens. This is no mean feat—and those interested in crafting

chapbooks or chairs may benefit from close study of the accomplishment. Haiku are such tiny, weightless bits of thought, they threaten at every turn to fly off into the ether. *Turn Turn* tethers them like so many gorgeous kites in flight to the reading chair.

Snow in a Silver Bowl: A Quest for the World of Yūgen, by Hiroaki Sato (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2013). 114 pages; 6½" x 4¼". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-23-2. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by John Martone

The foremost and immensely productive translator / interpreter of Japanese poetry to the American audience, Sato's oeuvre includes translations of Santōka and Hōsai, a biography of Mishima (*Persona*), two volumes of Miyazawa Kenji, an anthology of Japanese women poets, Hagiwara Sakutarō's *Howling at the Moon*, and Takamura Kotarō's *A Brief History of Imbecility*. As Sato's subtitle suggests, *Snow in a Silver Bowl* is a more personal work. Because *yūgen* is so often seen as a concept no *gaijin* can understand, Sato begins by turning to friends such as Leza Lowitz, Liza Dalby, Ron Castile, Doris Barga, and his teacher Lindley Williams Hubbell for definitions and analogues. Their suggestions include Garbo, Beethoven's string quartets, and Fellini's *La Strada*. As Sato's essay unfolds, Pound and Yeats—both deeply influenced by Nō—appear, as do Shakespeare, Borges, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Poe, Verlaine and Baudelaire. Such a sweep (in one hundred and fourteen pages, no less) will take your breath away. So much for ethnocentrism!

Sato traces the kanji for *yūgen* (幽玄) back to Laozi's "obscure" or mysterious (玄, *xuan*) female (The valley deity never dies / It is called the ineffable female). In early Japanese court poetry, *yūgen* manifests as a noblewoman in distress. Hitomaro's female persona voices it as a "sigh of remonstrance" in the *Manyōshū*:

Nights he promised to come but did not ... deciding not to wait is better than waiting

The courtly epitome of *yūgen* of course is Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*, in which the etiquette of conversation and poetic exchange turn on artfully contrived ambiguity. Sato's discussion of the *Genji* and its reception by writers from medieval to Mishima and beyond is his work's leitmotiv.

Compiler of the seventh imperial anthology, poet-critic Shunzei (1114–1204) greatly admired the *Genji*. He was to take Buddhist vows and adapt courtly aesthetics to the hermitage, giving *yūgen* a spiritual resonance. His *Overview of Poetic Styles Since Ancient Times* "posit[s] that a pursuit of poetry would lead to enlightenment." The "heart" of Saigyō's famous poem is *yūgen*:

Even to the heartless being pity is known: snipes rise from a marsh this autumn evening

For Kamo no Chōmei (1113-95?), *yūgen* comes to mean something kin to what George Steiner calls poetic difficulty. In his *Mumyōshō* ("Nameless Jottings"), for example, Chōmei writes, "How a poem works is altogether hard to grasp ... Above all, the matter of *yūgen* confuses you the moment you hear the word ... But those who have attained the state tell us that, in essence, it simply has to be an overtone that doesn't manifest itself in words, a feeling that isn't visible in the way the poem is made."

Of course *yūgen* is most famously associated with the Zeami's Nō drama, and Sato offers synopses and discussion of Aoi, Nonomiya, and Yūgao. (Sato's title comes from Zeami's definition of *yūgen* as "snow in a silver bowl.") Zeami relates *yūgen* to the Heart Sutra's Form is emptiness; emptiness form, and for renga poet Shinei as well, "[Y]ou must realize that this world is a dream, an illusion ... you must keep *yūgen* in mind." Ultimately, Bashō's sense of *sabi* and *shiori*, too, have their roots here, and that ancient pond is "an embodiment of *yūgen*."

From Sato's first page, the *Genji* is an appropriately haunting presence. Contemporary tanka poet Ishii Tatsuhiko claims, "In Japan for the last thousand years, true art has been that which attained the state of *yūgen*,

which is to say an attempt to approach the world of *The Tale of Genji*.” Sato fittingly closes with Tatsuhiko’s tanka sequence on *Suzumushi*, the “most *yūgen*” of Murasaki’s novel and thereby gives the concept of *yūgen* a renewed, postmodern (and indeed literal) currency. Such is his immense learning, and style that the work attains the state it describes.

Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years, edited by Jim Kacian, Philip Rowland, and Allan Burns (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013). 424 pages; 5¼”x7½”. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-393-23947-8. Price: \$23.95 from booksellers

Reviewed by Paul Miller

To set expectations, the editors make clear on page one of the latest large-press haiku anthology that the current volume is not “an exhibit of all the best work produced by those authors who are represented.” This differentiates *Haiku in English* from Cor van den Heuvel’s seminal *The Haiku Anthology*, Bruce Ross’ *Haiku Moment*, and also from the annual Red Moon anthologies. Instead, *Haiku in English* is the history of English-language haiku—as seen by the editors—charted by haiku poets themselves through their work.

What this means is that certain well-known poems or well-known poets are undoubtedly excluded, and that the poems by those included are open to interpretation as to whether or not the poems represent their best work. Instead, the included haiku are ones the editors felt “emphasized each poet’s contribution to the genre, how much s/he brought to it that others could then adopt for their own work.” This approach is risky. As with any anthology there will be questions of why a certain poem was included at the expense of another; and the fact that the editors make clear that these aren’t necessarily the best haiku, invites us to wonder (assuming we’re looking for the best haiku) if we shouldn’t pick up another anthology instead. Don’t. Where *Haiku in English* succeeds is in carving its own niche that takes the reader from the beginnings of English-language haiku (ELH) to the present, in a chronological and engaging way. However, this isn’t to say it is without complications.

After a friendly introduction by Billy Collins, the editors' history starts with Ezra Pound's famous Metro poem, gives the reader a brief taste (few poets in the anthology get more than three poems) of the Imagists (Fletcher, Lowell), Beats (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Snyder), and others before settling into what might be considered the poems of the haiku community: meaning haiku published in journals and anthologies solely dedicated to the genre.

The early poets don't take up a lot of space and it is clear that between 1913 (Pound) and 1958 (Cummings) poets didn't have a full understanding of the genre; yet it is interesting to see how each poet incorporates their knowledge of ELH into their own larger oeuvre. These weren't solely haiku poets. To find out the whys of this knowledge void, the reader needs to go into the back of the volume which contains a nice history of ELH written by editor Kacian—although some of the sequencing of the history differs from that of the larger poem section, so following along isn't as easy as it could be. I found this history the part to read first.

Despite some of the complications these early poets bring to the volume (for example: was Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" an attempt at haiku, or coincidentally "haiku-like") they are important to placing haiku in the larger poetic field, so I am glad at their inclusion. Yet the strength of the anthology is when the genre begins to gain traction in the 1960s through the work of poets such as van den Heuvel, Hackett, and Virgilio. Because of their deeper understanding of the genre, these are ELH's true pioneers, and it is enjoyable to witness the evolution of the form through their work and the work of the fledgling haiku journals of the same decade. Since each poet isn't largely represented you don't always get a strong sense of the individual poets, but you get a sense of how haiku changed and responded to individual poets/poems.

However, if we are to think of *Haiku in English* as primarily a history of the genre, rather than a "best of" collection, it would have been nice to include some discussion of the various movements and aberrations. For the seasoned haiku poet, this can be fun to suss out in the haiku themselves; for a newcomer, they will be harder to discern. Another complaint might be a missing sense of time. The first thirteen pages (12 poets) cover forty-seven years; the next thirteen pages (6 poets) only four years; in

later periods the time dilation can be even greater. The book could have been broken into sections to provide a needed pacing.

Organizational issues aside, the presented haiku contain solid choices, which are after all, the true point of the book. All the big-name poets are included and some lesser ones as well. The reader will recognize many classic poems, but also quieter ones. As a bonus it is an engaging book that poses questions and provides alternative ways of looking at ELH. One such bonus is the realization that the current introduction to ELH of what has been called *gendai* is but the latest salvo in a healthy debate of what is and isn't haiku.

Haiku in English is not designed to replace any of the aforementioned anthologies; rather it is designed to complement them. A book not only a student, but also a lover of haiku should have on their shelf.

BRIEFLY NOTED

frog, stone buddha, & moon, by karma tenzing wangchuk (Windsor, Conn.: Bottle Rockets Press, 2013). 106 pages; 4" x 5¾". Glossy black and white card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9792257-7-2. Price: \$10.00 plus \$3 s&h from Stanford M. Forrester, P.O. Box 189, Windsor, CT 06095 or www.bottlerocketspress.com

This volume contains two of the poet's previous collections: *frog* (1999), and *stone buddha* (2009); as well as a new one: *moon*. Wangchuk is one of our best haiku poets. He writes with the empathy of Issa and the lightness of Bashō's later work. Since the poet produced so few versions of his earlier collections, we are indebted to editor Forrester for reissuing them. Grab this one! From his newest: *an aspirin chewed / to soothe a toothache— / winter moon*