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A Vast Sky, ed. by Bruce Ross, Kōko Katō, Dietmar Tauchner, and Patricia Prime (Bangor, Maine: Tancho Press, 2015). 184 pages; 5½"x8½". White card covers with black lettering; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-983714-12-5. Price \$15.95 from editor Ross at dr\_bruce\_ross@hotmail.com

## Reviewed by Paul Miller

Haiku may be one of the poetic forms most practiced across the globe, so the current international anthology—with over 450 poets—is welcome. The haiku within were written between 2000 and 2014 so the 'Contemporary' in the title is appropriate.

The book is divided into four geographic sections: "Japan," "Europe," "The New World," and "The Rest of the World." This grouping was dictated by the "historical progression of haiku's dispersion and practice." While this does lend an organizational frame to the poems, it is a bit misleading in that it implies all countries within a category developed haiku at the same time, or at least in the same path of progression, and that any one country in one section developed prior to a country in a later section—something usually not the case. In fact, haiku outside Japan developed rather splatter-fashioned, with most regions not connecting until the arrival of the internet. The grouping also paints the countries in the final section a bit too broadly, covering as it does Australia, Africa, China, and many others large and small.

Ross introduces the volume as a whole as well as the section on the Americas; Kato on Japan, Tauchner on Europe, and Prime on the Rest. The main introduction is a nice overview of the genre. The section introductions talk well, if not briefly, about each region's history with haiku, and in places try to create a larger generic history for each; it is here that the introductions stumble a bit. For example, in his introduction to haiku in "The New World," specifically when speaking of Canadian haiku, Ross says, "There is a tendency in Canada to both follow the haiku form and content of classic Japanese haiku and, contrariwise, to experimentation..." A meaningless sentence.

The majority of poets included in the anthology showcase one poem each, and this is the real value of the collection. In some ways it also demonstrates why the introductions (and in its defense, discussions outside this book) have a hard time telling a global story on haiku. For example, two poems from the same page in the "Japan" section:

Field of wild grasses... the children playing with a single rope

The enormous sky does not recall the rainbow of a day before

Hashimoto Eiji

Hasegawa Kai

The first could easily find a home in any U.S. haiku journal while the second would be roundly criticized for anthropomorphism. These same contradictions are evident in other countries. This is obviously a good thing, and illustrates both the breadth of the opportunities within the genre as well as the breadth of the individual poets—and in the case of *A Vast Sky*, the breadth of the anthology. The haiku in *A Vast Sky* cover a variety of styles and voices, and do an excellent job of showcasing a wide range of talent, although there are some glaring omissions: Ban'ya Natsuishi (Japan), Martin Lucas (England), Roberta Beary (United States), to name but three.

It is impossible to adequately illustrate the broad scope of the anthology in a review so a few poems will have to suffice:

Between umbrellas a wet hat walks the street all by itself

there must be light where they came from chestnut blossoms

Willy Cuvelier

Gabriel Rosenstock

spring rain out of dark earth the reddest radish sucking marrow from the bone autumn drought

Irene Golas

Sandra Simpson

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The review copy sent to Modern Haiku contained some printer's errors that are assumed to have been fixed. They were primarily related to the introductions so would not detract from the reader's enjoyment of the poems.

While readers may find fault with omissions of poets and schools of haiku, these concerns pale against the volume's ambition. The editors are to be rewarded for taking on the challenge of a global anthology that goes further afield than most. Worth a look!

## **BRIEFLY NOTED**

Haiku 2015, ed. by Lee Gurga and Scott Metz (Lincoln, Ill.: Modern Haiku Press, 2015). 110 pages; 5½"x4¼". Glossy four color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 0-9741894-7-2. Price: \$8.00 from the publisher at www.modernhaiku.org

The latest anthology from editors Gurga and Metz introduces the haiku using a list from Martin Lucas and Stuart Quine's essay "Haiku as Poetic Spell" (*Presence* 41) as an invocation to what lies within the anthology's pages. The list distinguishes desirable characteristics in a haiku from those that are often staid and predictable. The result is a collection of lively, shape-shifting, and surprising haiku. Most of all, they are strong representations of the form. Buy it!

*The Sunflower*, by Steve April (Mountain View, Calif.: Barberry Press, 2014). 55 pages, 5½"x8½". Glossy four color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9744686-3-1. Price: \$12.00 from online booksellers

A collection of seven haiku sequences that are too often narrative and too abstract to truly be haiku. *Vessels of peril, midway / Between a past and a future / Blueprint.*