

questions. Each rereading offers an opportunity to reconsider any conclusions you may have drawn.

sea retreating for now we both take it back

⊕RS, by Dan Schwerin (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2015). 80 pages; 4¼" X 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-936848-35-5. Price: \$12.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Paul Miller

The title of Schwerin's debut collection contains the logical operator \oplus which insists that of two conditions (or perhaps images, phrases, etc ...) only one can be true; the other must be false. The embedded cross in the symbol also hints at Schwerin's vocation as a minister.

It can be read as a warning of multiple viewpoints or approaches to the poems, the lack of clear narrative that haiku are known for—but also life itself. As would be expected, there are a number of poems about faith:

sitting down to pray the river a stone can hold

all the changes
while we prayed
snow covers the lot

Yet even these have an elusiveness to them. Nothing feels wholly decided, which is refreshing considering the baggage we often associate with men of faith. Schwerin shows that he has the same struggles and doubts as the rest of us.

In the brief biography at the back, Schwerin describes his role as minister as a 'shepherd.' It is not hard to see how this role—corralling, assessing, guiding, and sometimes letting go of parishioners—might create a worldview in line with the \oplus operator. In fact, there are a number of haiku about separation or letting go—and the acceptance such events require.

he's dead
 corn is an ear, a stalk
 and a field

the loss of our farm land keeping the moon

The first poem is a favorite, suggesting that any one person or thing is more than just itself. In the second, the one-line form allows readings in which after the sale the family keeps the moon, yet conflicting with that is a reading in which it stays with the land. Of course, in real life, both are true; however, at the emotional time of sale, it may not feel that way.

It is a theme the poet expands to people and insects. Things are rarely static in Schwerin's world.

cottonwood	communion
they disappear	they let the fly
when the shelter closes	go first

While Schwerin has a good command of common haiku practice, he also pushes at its boundaries. This is most often seen in the many one-liners where he can get a bit abstract.

what a snake did between us still original sin

not as green as the grass has been saying

A small few feel forced and close too quickly, as in:

a cornered raven in my chest Sunday night

On the whole the poems in the collection are consistently strong. The author breaks the book into four sections and the ordering within each is perfect. I particularly like the sequencing of these two:

I tell him I hear
that voice, too,
spring breeze

just how
to hold you
paper kite

The collection recently won the Haiku Foundation's 2015 Touchstone Award. It is well deserved. Schwerin is a poet we have been enjoying for a while and $\oplus RS$ is easy to recommend.

BRIEFLY NOTED

African American Haiku: Cultural Visions, ed. by John Zheng (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2016). 197 pages; 6¼" X 9¼". Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-4968-0303-0. Price: \$65.00 from online booksellers

Ten essays on the individual haiku practices of Richard Wright, James A. Emanuel, Etheridge Knight, Sonia Sanchez, and Lenard D. Moore. Half of the essays reveal good study on their subjects, but on the whole an uneven collection. As might be expected, considering an excessive focus on Wright's haiku, the essays on Wright don't reveal any new ground. Other essays work best when they examine a poet's individual use of haiku, especially in relation to Emanuel, Knight, and in some ways Sanchez, rather than unconvincingly trying to link their work to traditional Japanese aesthetics. The volume concludes with three essays on Lenard D. Moore that nicely detail his history with the genre (although one is a hagiography). An essay by Ce Rosenow interestingly bridges Moore's individual haiku experiences with a larger communal African-American narrative.