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## REVIEWS

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*Lit from Within: Haiku and Paintings*, by Ruth Yarrow (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2016). 150 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Semigloss blue and green card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-936848-68-3. Price: \$15.00 from [www.redmoonpress.com](http://www.redmoonpress.com).

*Reviewed by Charles Trumbull*

*Lit from Within*, the collected haiku of Ruth Yarrow, contains 209 verses published between 1979 and 2016, that is, works spanning Yarrow's thirty-five-plus-year career in the genre. The book is divided into chapters named for the four compass points, each representing a geographical area of the country and continent: "North: Upstate New York to Canada," "South: West Virginia to Costa Rica," "East: New York City to Maine," and "West: Kansas to Washington State." These in turn represent the principal areas in which Yarrow has lived, worked, and advocated.

Few poets are able to use haiku to celebrate their life activities and pursuits the way Yarrow has. With environmental science degrees from Antioch College and Cornell University, she taught ecology and environmental education for twenty-five years at the grade school, high school, and college levels, and served as a naturalist in environmental education centers in the United States, with the Peace Corps in Ghana, and in Costa Rica. She has been an activist and organizer for a wide variety of peace, justice, social, and environmental issues. She has been involved with such groups as the Tompkins County [New York] Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign; the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a domestic and international interfaith organization concerned with peace and justice,

nonviolent alternatives to conflict, and the rights of conscience; and the Washington State Physicians for Social Responsibility, which promotes responsible cleanup of nuclear waste. Health and safety issues in the mining industry is the focus of *Voices from the Appalachian Coalfields* (2015), a collection of found poems coauthored with her late husband Mike. These and similar topics inform many of Yarrow's haiku, for example:

deeper into the forest slapping black flies more gently	against the wind we hold the peace banner — our spines straighten
candlelight procession the night before the war — wax congeals on asphalt	rising huge beyond the cooling tower thunderhead
dimmer beneath his miner's lamp whites of his eyes	after the rape her husband's eyes a void
frayed prayer flags through the barbed wire fence a child's face	food bank line — a pigeon picks up crumbs too small to see

I find Yarrow's restraint and subtlety in these haiku quite remarkable. How easy it is for a poet to lapse into shrillness and sententiousness. How much more powerful is understatement.

The best known of Yarrow's haiku, however, are not her socially conscious works but rather those about family life and nature. The book begins with a selection about children, launched with one of her most celebrated haiku, and continues in the same vein:

warm rain before dawn my milk flows into her unseen	morning sun through fog soft focus of the newborn's gaze
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before the sled moves	waking beside you
little girls already	the room glows
squealing	with snowlight

Yarrow's haiku have a classical Japanese feeling about them, but this is a question of subject matter (generally nature) and mood (sober and respectful). She writes in three lines. I am aware of only one non-three-liner that she has written, this modern classic:

after the garden party    the garden

Her haiku usually have a break in sense (*kire*) after the first or second line, but she doesn't worry about syllable count or insist on season words. Humor is present, though muted and usually ironic in nature. Only occasionally does the poet slip into double entendre or wordplay, and even that is low-key and amusing:

evening: my yawn	ferry horn —
slips through the bus window	steep plunge of the island
to a stranger	into the sound

She can even be subtly erotic at times:

wild island  
my breasts touch tips  
of ostrich ferns

Ruth Yarrow must be considered a nature haikuist; moreover her nature is not nature merely observed, but nature experienced, inhabited even. Reading haiku such as the following, it is clear that she dwells in nature and does not distinguish herself from it:

my thumbprint	inner canyon —
on this thousand-year-old pot	a jagged slice
fits hers	of constellations

The poet's joy and awe at matching her thumbprint with that of the ancient Southwestern potter precisely pinpoints this haiku on the vertical axis of time and the horizontal axis of culture. Yarrow's "inner canyon" should be viewed as her personal path in the same way that we understand Bashō's "Narrow Road to the Interior."

Speaking of Bashō, Cid Corman interprets him to have written "Moon & sun are passing figures of countless generations." The sun is a certainly a constant companion for Yarrow. In *Lit from Within*, fully ten percent of the haiku in this book use the word "sun" in one way or another, and "dawn," "light," and "the moon" appear several times as well. Yarrow's book is truly a collection of light and joy.

light	sun through fog:
up under the gull's wing	the turtle's neck unfolds
sunrise	her head
evening	moonlit ripples
our paddles drip	the distant quavering
into liquid sunset	of a loon

*Lit from Within* is a most welcome addition to the haiku literature. The publishing values by Red Moon Press are very fine, and—as if it needed any more luster—the book is illuminated by a number of the author's winsome brush-and-ink drawings, plus larger paintings used for chapter headings. I'm very happy I have a copy of this book. You will be delighted to have one too.

*Highway of Sleeping Towns*, Deborah P. Kolodji (Pasadena, Calif.: Shabda Press, 2016. 114 pages; 6" × 9". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9915772-3-1. Price: \$16.00 from online booksellers

*Reviewed by Marjorie Buettner*

I see Deborah Kolodji register her travel locations on Facebook and marvel at the varied destinations. She seems to have journeyed every-