

mentaries, Wilkinson notices “that Bashō and Keats both stand for an unconditional openness to all experience, so unconditional that it demands a complete transparency—or, Keat’s word, *annihilation*—of the self.” Wilkinson explains further that for Bashō “the self probably had a religious-metaphysical meaning rooted in Buddhism; that is, the self represents our attachments, our preoccupations, our striving, everything that traps us in a divided ‘me/not-me’ relation to the world, and therefore it is an obstacle not just to ‘true’ poetry but to our own ‘true’ being as part of a greater reality beyond individual identity.” Wilkinson goes on to consider how “going on the road” tested both poets’ openness to all experiences of humanity—prostitutes, impoverished people suffering fleas, and horses pissing nearby. Keats expresses his disgust along his travels, but Bashō accepts these situations and experiences with grace and understanding of shared suffering. Wilkinson cites this haiku as an example: “Fleas and lice, / horses pissing nearby— / such was my sleeping place”. He concludes: “Bashō was steeped in a centuries-old, Buddhist-influenced literary tradition that returned again and again to the transitoriness of this world and the vanity of all our individual cares and ambitions. Unfair as the comparison is, perhaps we have to say that Bashō was the better traveler because, so to speak, he was better equipped to annihilate self.”

Noon: An Anthology of Short Poems, edited by Philip Rowland (Japan and United Kingdom, Isobar Press, 2019). 158 pages; 5½" × 8½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-4-907359-26-3. Price: \$20.00 plus shipping in the US. Details from isobarpress.com

Reviewed by John Stevenson

Every so often, someone asks how we can create bridges between English-language haiku and “main-stream” poetry. Perhaps without the mixed metaphor. It seems obvious that one strategy would involve supporting journals that showcase both sorts of poetry on a more or less equal foot-

ing. *Noon* has been doing that since 2004. The journal features “short poems,” some of which are haiku or haiku-like. This equilibrium has been editor Philip Rowland’s project from the start and now he has gifted us with a strong retrospective anthology featuring a thoughtful amalgam of haiku and other short poems.

In his introductory notes, Rowland makes the point that he is presenting poems more directly than poets. So, rather than sequencing the work based upon authors’ last names or in chronological order of publication, he has arranged the work on a sort of renku-like basis. Actually, he has devised what I consider a satisfying compromise. The included work by each poet appears as a unit but the arrangement of those units is linked through elements of content, tone, and style, as would be the case with linked verses in a renku. The result is an anthology that registers as a single work.

It’s remarkable how successfully the book presents poetry over poet. Even though we may know many of the poets, especially those writing haiku, this knowledge never distracts us from the sense of unity the book conveys. It’s just a good read. While not a narrative work, it does seem to have a kind of narrative arc. In place of a “climax” it reaches a sort of “farthest point” of experimentation and concludes with a “slight return.”

Noon has always been a place for serious innovation and it’s no surprise for haiku readers to see work by the likes of Marlene Mountain, Richard Gilbert, Eve Luckring and Scott Metz in its pages. The representation of haiku does tend toward the cerebral. Probably this is natural in an interface with other poetry but it may put off some readers if they are committed to a vision of “traditional” haiku.

To give some sense of the linking (and perhaps the nature of the short poems included, though they are many and various in their natures) here are the final two poems by Bob Heman:

there is only one night
that the days approach
to drink from

This street was a lot more interesting on the map.

They are followed by the first from Cherie Hunter Day:

bird's-eye view
torn wet and applied
to the appetite

And an example from two familiar names in the haiku community—
Gary Hotham's final entry, which is followed by George Swede's first:

more stone
inside the stone —
child's play

our backyard trees —
their unconditional
unconcern

And here is a short poem by Mark Young:

Sorry,

nothing
matched your
search terms. Please

try again with
a different
fish.

This is followed by a well-known and celebrated haiku by Chris Gordon:

a love letter to the butterfly gods with strategic misspellings

Since *Noon* is available on-line, with an archive that goes back to 2014, readers can easily look it over before deciding whether the anthology might be worth their money. For those who like what they see on-line, Philip Rowland's editorial tour de force is an absolute must.